

SENSE OF HUMOR

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Abraham Lincoln's Personality

Sense of Humor

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Lincoln Stories

Woman's
Constitution
2-1906



"A church?" said I.
"Sure, boss," said he, pointing with his toe, 'dere's de steps, an' dere's de pews where de folks set, an' dere's de pulpit.'
"Yes, I see," said I, "but why don't you make a minister?"
"He looked up with a grin. 'Lawsy!' he said, 'I ain't got mud enough!'"

"Sufficient for the Day"
A clergyman from Springfield, Illinois, the president's home town, who called on Lincoln early in his administration was like

know a lawyer member of his administration was secretly scheming for the prize. Lincoln was urged by a friend to put a stop to this piece of political treachery.
"Senator," said the president, "you were brought up on a farm and know what a lip fly is. Once my brother and I were ploughing corn out in Sangamon, I driving and he guiding. Our old horse was so lazy that we could hardly persuade him to move, but all of a sudden he started up and tore along the furrow so fast that I could hardly keep up with him. When



Compiled by Arthur Guiterman

"So I got in, thankfully enough, and we drove along for a time in silence, each reading his papers. But that wagon pitched from one side of the road to the other, and jounced in and out of ruts and bumped from stump to stone until I grew suspicious and putting my head out of the window saw that the driver was fairly rolling in his seat."

INSTINCTIVE American humor originated in the ability of the pioneers to jest with danger and privation. Evils existed and had to be borne; so why not make them more bearable by laughing at them? True American humor is always philosophical.

Lincoln Stories



Lincoln's Laughter.

The very phrase is misleading. Did Lincoln laugh? He made others laugh, told perpetual, inimitable stories that neither tears nor anger could resist; but he himself was neither a loud, nor a riotous, nor an inappropriate laugher.

To his laughter was a solvent of the difficulties of life—a gentle, universal balm to soothe the blows and rubs and stings that even the stoutest shoulders must receive from the buffeting of common toil, and above all, from the immense effort to set right the tangled tissues and the unhinged framework of this everlastingly imperfect world in which we live. To Lincoln laughter was not a gesture; it was a point of view.

It was something exquisite and necessary as an antidote to tears. How would the great President have borne his unequalled load of pain if he had not been able to relieve it by the smile that comes from seeing the pettiness of all evil as compared with the goodness of God?

But it was not merely for comic relief that Lincoln made use of laughter. He gave it a richer function. For relaxing tense situations he knew that there is nothing like it. A man cannot knock you down, or even insult you, if you make him laugh. The burly Stanton, the aggressive Chase, the wily Seward went to Cabinet meetings each with a chip on his shoulder. Lincoln told a story, and they laughed, one and all, until the chip fell off. Then he could mould them to his purposes.

The rarity of such humor in statesmen of Lincoln's rank has never been sufficiently noticed. Where was it in Cromwell or Napoleon? Take the long list of great Americans—Jefferson, the Adamses, Jackson, Webster, Sumner; how much more attractive some of them would have been if they had had it! Take even Washington; great as he is, he stands above us and apart from us, on a cold pedestal. But Lincoln we can touch—largely because of his laughter. Only Franklin shared that high quality of humor with him. Emerson speaks of "nestling in Plato's brain." Thank God, we can nestle in Lincoln's heart! —Youth's Companion.

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The Humor of Abraham Lincoln

By Quaker O'Taylor

EARLY in 1865 a Southern man wrote to Lincoln that as slaves were accustomed to work under compulsion, by being suddenly freed it would bring ruin on the South, and whites and blacks would stampede together.

The Great Emancipator Had a Rich Supply of Stories and Anecdotes Which Served Him Well In Meeting Problems of His Day and the Arguments of Pleaders and Opponents

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EARLY in 1855 a Southern man wrote to Lincoln that as slaves were accustomed to work under compulsion, they being suddenly freed it would bring ruin on the South, and whites and blacks would be torn apart.

Lincoln made this convincing reply: "I can only say, in reply to your statement of the case, that it reminds me of a man out in Illinois, by the name of Case, who undertook, a few years ago, to raise a large herd of hogs. It was a great trouble to feed them, and how to get around this was a puzzle to him. At length he hit upon the plan of planting an immense field of potatoes, and when they were sufficiently grown, he turned the whole herd into the field and let them have full swing, thus saving not only the labor of feeding the hogs but that also of digging the potatoes! Charmed with his sagacity he stood one day leaning against the fence, caressing his hogs, when a neighbor came along. 'Well, well,' said he, 'Mr. Case, this is all very fine. Your hogs are doing very well just now, but you know how hard the Illinois frost comes early, and the ground freezes a foot deep. Then what are you going to do?' This was a view of the matter which Mr. Case had not taken into account. Butchered hogs, then, lay away on ice in December or January. He scratched his head and at length stammered: 'Well, it may come pretty hard on the hogs, but I don't see but it will be root hog, or die.'

Upon one occasion a delegation of bankers called at the White House and bitterly protested to President Lincoln against a bill passed by Congress taxing the revenue. President listened attentively to what they had to say, and replied: 'Now that reminds me of a circumstance that took place in a neighborhood where I lived when I was a boy. In the Spring of the year, the neighbors were fond of a dish which they called "greens." One day after dinner, a large family were taken sick, and the doctor called in, who attributed it to the greens, of which all had freely partaken. Living in the family was a half-witted fellow named Jake. On a subsequent occasion, when greens had been gathered for dinner, the head of the house said, 'Now, boys, before running any further risk on this thing, we will first try them on Jake. If he stands it, we are all right.' And just so, suppose Congress thought it would try this tax on the State Bank.'

WHAT TO DO WITH DAVIS

A short time before the close of the war some one asked Lincoln what he expected to do with Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States. His reply was in the form of a story:

'There was a boy in Springfield who saved up his money and bought a cow, which after the novelty wore off, became a great nuisance. He was one day leading him through the streets, and his hands lit to keep clear of the little vixen, who had torn his clothes half off of him. At length he sat down on the curbstone, completely tugged out. A man passing was attracted by the lad's unhappiness, and he took up the matter. "Oho," was the reply, "this cow is a trouble to me." "Why, don't you get her?" "I don't want her," said the gentleman. "Hush! said the boy, 'don't run see to it, I'm giving his rope off, I am going to let him do it, and then I will go home and tell the folks that he got away from me.'

'It is said that Lincoln told the following story about his hair during a meeting of his cabinet. "When I was nominated at Chicago, an enterprising fellow, who thought it a great many people would like to see how Abe Lincoln looked like, took a camera along before sat for a photograph, the fellow being seen it rushed over and bought the negative. He at once got out and set the woodcuts, and so active was their circulation they were soon selling in all parts of the country. Some of the boys reached Springfield! I heard a boy crying them for sale on the streets. "What a likeness of Abe Lincoln!" he shouted. "Buy one, you two shillings!" Will look a good deal better when he gets his hair combed by a barber.'

Responding to criticism for appointing a man to office who had opposed his election for a second term, Lincoln said: "Well, I suppose Judge T., having been disappointed before, did believe pretty ugly, but that wouldn't make him any less fit for the place, and I think I have scriptural authority for appointing him. I remember when the Lord was on Mount Sinai, getting out a commission for Aaron, that same Aaron was at the foot of the mountain making a false god for the people to worship. Yet Aaron got his commission, you know."

NOTHING BUT A NOISE

Lincoln told this story to an artist who was painting his picture at the White House: "Some years ago a crowd of emigrants fresh from the Emerald Isle, seeking their fortune, were making their way toward the West. Coming to a river one evening, upon a pond of water, they were greeted by a grand chorus of billings—a kind of music they had never before heard. "Bee-ah!—Bee-ah!" Overcome with terror, they clutched their shillalags and crept cau-

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ciously forward, straining their eyes in every direction to catch sight of the enemy, but he was not to be found! At last a happy idea solved the mystery, for he sprang to his companion and exclaimed, "And sure, Jamie, it's my opinion it's nothing but a noise!"

During the campaign of 1840 it was charged by the Democrats that the Whigs were lords and aristocrats. Lincoln, who was a Whig candidate for the Illinois legislature, squelched this charge with this amusing retort of his boyhood. "It was a very poor boy. I lived out on a nabob at eight dollars a month. I had only one pair of breeches and one buckskin, and I was so poor that I had to wear the buckskin when it was too hot to wear the buckskin, and I kept shivering until they let several holes of my legs bare between the toes of my shoes. The lower part of my legs were so cold that I was growing taller they were becoming shorter, and so much tighter that they let the steel around my legs so tight I can be seen to this day. If you call this aristocracy, I plead guilty to the charge."

One day a farmer rushed into the White House and demanded permission to see the President at once, as he had important business to transact. He complained to Mr. Lincoln that Union soldiers in passing his place had taken his horse and some hay, and he wanted his claim on immediate consideration. The President smiled in his usual friendly way, and said: "I am sorry to hear of this. If I should attempt to consider every such individual case I should find work for twenty Presidents. In my early days I knew one, Jack Chase, who was a lumberman on the Illinois, and when steady and sober, the best trawlerman on the river. It was quite a tick twenty-five years ago to take the logs over the rapids, but he was skillful with a raft, and always kept her straight in the channel. Finally a steamer was put on, and Jack's deck was gone, poor fellow—was made captain of her. He always used to take the wheel going through the rapids. One day, when the boat was plunging and wallowing along the boiling current, and Jack's utmost vigilance was being exercised to keep her in the narrow channel, a boy pulled his scabbard and bawled him with, "Say 'Mister Captain! I wish you would just stop the boat a minute—I've lost my apple aboard!"

LINCOLN AND HIS CABINET

In 1862 quite a number of people thought Lincoln ought to fire the members of his cabinet and get some new blood. At half a dozen of these know-it-alls had the hardihood to call on him and make that suggestion. Lincoln made answer by telling the story of the spotted animals:

"Gentlemen, when I was a young man I used to know very well one Joe Wilson, who built himself a log cabin not very far from where I lived. Joe was very fond of eggs and chickens, and he took a good deal of pains in fitting up a poultry shed. Having at length gotten together a choice lot of young fowls, of which he was very proud, he began to be very much annoyed by the depredations of those little black and white spotted animals, which it is not necessary to name. One night Joe was awakened by an unusual cackling and fluttering among his chickens. Getting up, he crept out to see what was going on. It was a moonlight night, and he soon caught sight of half a dozen of the little pests, which with their dewy wings were flying out of the shadow of the shed. Very wrathful Joe put a double

charge in his old musket, and thought he would clean out the whole tribe at one shot. Somehow he only killed one, and the balance escaped and crossed over into Indiana. In telling the story, Joe would always pause here and hold his nose. "Why didn't you follow them up and kill the rest?" inquired the neighbors. "Blast it!" said Joe, "why it was eleven weeks before I got over killing one if you want any more skinning in, that I use you can do it yourselves."

"While inspecting the Dutch Gap Canal at City Point, Va., Lincoln turned to General Grant, and said: "Grant, do you know what this reminds me of? Out in Springfield, Ill., there was a blacksmith, one day, not having much to do, took a piece of soft iron and attempted to weld it into an agricultural implement. He discovered that the iron would not hold out, then he concluded that it was not a blacksmith's iron, and so he took too much iron, attempted to make an axe, but decided after working a while that they were not a blacksmith's iron. Finally, becoming disgusted, he filled the forge full of coal and brought the iron to a white heat. Then with his long tongs he took it from the bed of coals, and thrusting it into a bucket of water, he exclaimed with a oath, "Well, if I can't make anything out of you, I will make a fizzle, anyway. I am afraid that is all that we have done with the Dutch Gap Canal."

A 'BOIL' STORY

This "boil" story was told to Postmaster General Blair by Lincoln:

"Blair, did you know that fight has sometimes proven a cure for boils? Not long ago, when Colonel —, with his cavalry, was at the front and the Rebels were making their last drive for the sea, the Colonel was ordered out to a reconnaissance. He was troubled all the time with a big boil where it made horseback riding decidedly uncomfortable. He finally dismounted and ordered the troops forward without him. Soon he was startled by the rapid reports of pistols and the helter-skelter approach of his troops in full retreat before a yelling rebel force. He forgot everything but the yell, sprang into the saddle, and made capital time over the fences and ditches all save within the lines. The pain from the boil was gone, and the boil, too, and the Colonel swore that there was no cure for boils so sure as fight from rebel yell."

The following story was told by Lincoln by way of illustrating the existing friction between the Northern and Southern wings of the Democratic party: "I once knew a sound churchman by the name of Brown, who was a member of a very sober and pious community having in charge the erection of a bridge over a dangerous and rapid river. Several architects failed, and at last Brown and he had a friend named Jones, who had built several bridges and undoubtedly could build this one. So Mr. Jones was called in. "Can you build this bridge?" inquired the committee. "Yes," replied Jones, "or if not, I could build a bridge to the infernal regions if needed. I need no money, I am shocked, and Brown felt called upon to defend his friend. "I know Jones so well," said he, "and he is so honest a man and so good an architect that if he states soberly and positively that he can build a bridge to —, why, I believe it; but I feel bound to say that I have my doubts about the ability of the infernal devil. So when the politicians told me that the Northern and Southern wings of Democracy could be harmonized, why, I believed them, of course."

but I always had my doubts about the 'ability' on the other side."

NOT TOO HIGH

A young lawyer came to Lincoln for advice in conducting his practice. He was so tall, don't shoot too high—aim lower and common people will understand you. They are the ones you want to reach at least. As a rule, the ones you ought to reach are the common people. The educated and refined people will understand you, anyway. If you aim high, you will miss the mark. Aim at the masses and only hit those who need no hitting."

Replying in the campaign of 1852 to Douglas, who dwelt strongly on his confidence in Providence, Lincoln said: "Let us stand by our candidate, General Scott, as faithfully as he has always stood by our country, and I cannot doubt if we do not perceive a slight assistance of Judge Douglas' confidence in Providence as well as the people. I suspect that confidence is not more firmly fixed with the judge than it is with the old woman whose horse ran away with her. When she said she 'trusted in Providence' the 'stitches broke,' and then she broke, and then he came, at his leisure, he will the fate of Locofocoism as the victim of misplaced confidence."

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

(Continued from page 3)

and in a few years it became evident to slavery that if it failed to continue to hold a true balance of power in the United States Senate something more must be done. The Missouri compromise of 1820, of course, was the first step. But after this law had been built as a final decision, the situation changed. The movement was set on foot in the South to bring its nullification so that more slave states might be admitted.

Early in the fifties a movement was inaugurated in Missouri which had for its purpose the carrying of the slavery question to the territory of Nebraska. This movement bore fruit in 1854 when Senator Stephen A. Douglas, a Democrat, introduced a bill, designed to divide the territory of Nebraska in two parts, the southern part to contain slavery, and the northern part to be free. This bill became known as the Kansas-Nebraska bill and it provided that the settlers in the two territories should have the right to decide whether or not they would have slavery.

AFTER HEATED DEBATE

The bill was passed by Congress after heated debate, and it, of course, set aside the Missouri compromise because the territory was now under a different law provided for in the compromise of 1820.

Immediately there started a desperate struggle in the territory of Nebraska. The freeholders for the possession of Kansas, the slaveholders from Missouri, armed with guns, rode into the territory and began to settle the lands and so the New England states sent free settlers to checkmate them. The territory was now a hotbed of contention. The next five or six years and the outrages which were committed by the "Border Ruffians" during this time form a dark page in the history of American development. In the end the Free-state men won and Kansas was admitted to the Union a commonwealth opposed to slavery.

The repeal of the Missouri compromise by the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill and the border warfare which followed, were the first steps in the agitation through the North and anti-slavery sentiment grew by leaps and bounds. It was not long before the country was reached. Each argument made with the slavery was being repudiated in turn and the movement toward a more favorable to the slave power, because of the threat of an open civil war was continually being held by the Southern states over the nation.

People in the North were beginning to believe that the time was at hand for a showdown. The Whig party because of its opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska bill, was disorganized, and the Democratic organization was firmly in the grip of the South. People were open to the idea that the time was ripe for a new party, one which would have for its purpose the preservation of the Constitution of the Union, and the prevention of any further encroachment by the slave power on free soil.

That new organization, the Republican party, was proved, was to be the Republican party which was to prove to be the savior of the nation's greatest peril a man to save American constitutional government—and that man was Abraham Lincoln.

(To Be Continued)

Except a living man, there is nothing more wonderful than a book. A message to us from the dead, from human souls who were never seen, who lived perhaps thousands of miles away; and yet these, on those little sheets of paper, speak to us, amuse us, vivify us, comfort us, open our hearts to us as brothers.—R. Wesley.

(Photo copyrighted by Harris & Ewing)
"Uncle Joe" Cannon, Lincoln's Friend and Prolific Modern Story-Teller, (Right) and Robert T. Lincoln, Son of President Lincoln

Peepskill N. J.
**Lincoln's Keen Sense
of Humor Endear-
ed Him to Countrymen**

Highland Democrat
This is a tribute to Abraham Lincoln's sense of humor. Because he was a great American, Americans honor his memory each year by observing his birthday as a legal holiday. Because he was one of its greatest Presidents, the country has preserved his name and his fame by erecting an imposing memorial in the national capital, writes Marjorie Elaine Porter in the Detroit News.

Because he was intellectually great, the work of his pen still lives in our educational institutions, where his speeches are studied as examples of the finest and purest of English prose. Because of his undying patriotism, he is revered; because of his noble manhood, he is respected; because of his remarkable attainments, he is admired; but because of his sense of humor, he is beloved, and endeared to the hearts of his countrymen as a man, who with all his greatness was human enough to tell a good joke or to laugh at one.

Indeed Lincoln could tell good jokes, and he seemed to have an inexhaustible supply at his command. There are volumes of them now published which prove amusing and profitable reading matter. But Lincoln's "jokes" consisted of more than mere comedy. They were generally told for some purpose—to clinch an argument, prove a statement, or point out a moral.

Method in His Humor.

In many a trying crisis he showed himself to be master of the situation by relating some humorous anecdote that helped to carry his point and swing sentiment in favor of the cause he espoused. Under the stress of emotion or excitement, he relieved the strain of his nerves by giving vent to his irresistible sense of humor in telling some funny story. When he was waiting for the returns from the Republican convention in Chicago in 1860, he was under great nervous tension, but he amused himself and entertained the staff of the Springfield Journal by telling one good one after another, until he received the telegram announcing his nomination.

There was never a time, his biographers claim, when Abe Lincoln was too grave or too melancholy to fail to see the humor of a situation. Even at times when he seemed most careworn, and weighed down by the great problems and responsibilities with which he was struggling, he would suddenly chuckle to himself, a twinkle would come into his eyes, and he was "reminded" of some anecdote that applied to the case in question.

"I was never fined for contempt of court but once," a clerk of the court in Lincoln's time says, "Davis fined me \$5. Mr. Lincoln had just come in, and leaning over my desk, had told me a story so irresistibly funny that I broke out into a loud laugh. The judge called me to order, saying, 'This must be stopped, Mr. Lincoln, you are constantly disturbing this court with your stories.' Then to me: 'You may fine yourself \$5!' I apologized, but told the judge the story was worth the money.

"In a few minutes, the judge called me to him. 'What was the story that Lincoln told you?' he asked. I told him, and he laughed aloud in spite of himself. 'Remit your fine,' he ordered."

Had to Laugh Occasionally.

On one occasion it is told of how a very sad and solemn member of congress paid a visit to President Lincoln at the White House during one of the darkest periods of the Civil war. The member seemed deeply depressed. So did the President, who nevertheless found his sense of humor sufficiently active to think of a funny story. He began to tell it when he was interrupted by the member, who said he was there on important national business and not to hear funny stories.

Mr. Lincoln, it is recorded, looked hurt, the twinkle departed from his eye, but he motioned the member to a chair, and said, "Sit down, sit down, and let me explain. I have the very highest respect for you, and a regard not much less than your own, I guess, for the nation at large; but if I didn't get a chance to laugh sometimes I'd die in my tracks. I can be as serious as you are, but not all the time. Which reminds me—" and he concluded with the story he had begun.

There were others, too, who did not seem to understand that Lincoln's sense of humor was not only a strong stimulant for him in times of stress, but that it was also a powerful weapon with which he attacked his enemies or defended his cause. On one occasion when a major who was calling on the President with Col. Silas W. Burt, remarked, "Now, Mr. President, tell us one of your good stories," with particular emphasis on the "good." Mr. Lincoln defended his reputation as a story teller, by saying:

Always Had a Purpose.

"I believe I have the popular reputation of being a story-teller, but I do not deserve the name in its general sense, for it is not the story itself, but its purpose or effect that interests me. I often avoid a long and useless discussion by others, or a laborious explanation on my own part, by a short story that illustrates my point of view.

Humor
So, too, the sharpness of a refusal or the edge of a rebuke may be blunted by an appropriate story so as to save wounded feelings and yet serve the purpose. No, I am not simply a story-teller, but story-telling as an eloquent saves me much friction and distress."

Nevertheless he was fond of telling a good story for its own sake, as this little incident related of him shows.

WIT OF LINCOLN BROAD AND KEEN

Profoundly Melancholy, His Humor Mainly a Relief From His Natural Moodiness

Garbner Post 3-26-1924

By Henry W. Lawrence, Jr., Ph. D.
Professor of History and Political
Science in Connecticut College

Lincoln was in fact a profoundly melancholy man.

His never-failing humor in company was partly a disguise, but mainly a relief from his natural moodiness.

His eagerness for a joke, even in the midst of tragedy, sometimes gave offence.

On one occasion a noted Congressman called on him shortly after a disaster in the Civil war. Lincoln began to tell a story.

The Congressman jumped up and exclaimed, "Mr. President, I did not come here this morning to hear stories. It is too serious a time!" Lincoln's face changed. "Ashley," said he, "sit down!"

"You cannot be more anxious than I have been constantly since the beginning of the war; and I say to you now that were it not for this occasional vent I should die."

Lincoln was careful to protect his country against her enemies, but he was almost utterly careless about protecting himself against either enemies or friends.

He frequently exposed himself to not improbable attempts at assassination. Though persuaded to accept an escort when driving to and fro between Washington and his summer residence at the Soldiers' Home, he would sometimes give it the slip and make the journey on horseback alone.

In August of 1862, on one of these solitary rides, his life was attempted. It was about 11 at night; he was "jogging along at a slow gait, immersed in deep thought," when someone fired a rifle from near at hand.

Lincoln described jocosely how his horse "gave proof of decided dissatisfaction at the racket, and with one reckless bound he unceremoniously separated me from my \$8 plug hat."

Lincoln's Desire to Pardon All

All things considered, however, his life was probably more endangered by the exorciating keenness of his sympathy with the sufferings caused by the war. On hearing that two sons of an old friend were desperately wounded and would probably die, he broke out with: "Here, now, are these dear brave boys killed in this cursed war. My God! My God! It is too bad! They worked hard to earn money to educate themselves, and this is the end! I loved them as if they were my own."

Then, too, there was the unceasing torture of withholding pardons that he longed to grant. The American soldier did not take naturally to discipline. Death sentences, chiefly for desertion or for sleeping or other negligence on the part of sentries, were continually being passed by courts-martial. These used to come before the President on a stated day of the week, of which Lincoln would often speak with horror. He was always being appealed to in relation to such sentences by the father or mother of the culprit or some friend. At one time, it may be, he was too ready with pardon. "You do not know," he said, "how hard it is to let a human being die, when you feel that a stroke of your pen will save him." The import of the numberless pardon stories really is that he would spare himself no trouble to inquire, and to intervene whenever he could rightly follow his inclination toward clemency. A Congressman might force his way into his bedroom in the middle of the night, rouse him from his sleep to bring to his notice extenuating facts that had been overlooked, and receive the decision, "Well, I don't see that it will do him any good to be shot." These experiences told on Lincoln's strength very noticeably, and his friends often tried to persuade him to spare himself such harrowing interviews. They never succeeded, however. He told them he could not forget what he himself would feel in the place of the many poor souls whose agonies of intercession he shared.

Mercy With Shrewdness

General Butler used to write to him that he was destroying the discipline of the army, and other generals were often enraged by his refusal to carry out their decisions. "General," said he to one of these, "there are too many weeping widows in the United States now. For God's sake don't ask me to add to the number, for I tell you plainly I won't do it." Here kindness was blended with statecraft, mercy with shrewdness.

The generals could not grasp the political side of war. Lincoln tried to make them see that they were dealing with untrained people, intensely sensitive to the value of human life, impulsive, quick to forget offences, ultra-considerate of youth and its rashness. Whatever else the President did, he must not allow the country to think of the army as an ogre devouring its sons because of technicalities. The generals saw only the discipline, the morale of the soldiers; the President saw the far more difficult matter, the discipline and the morale of the citizens.

More than any other of our presidents, possibly excepting Andrew Jackson, Lincoln represented the plain people. In a peculiar sense, his government and his life were of the people, for the people, and by the people. He was below them in his origin. His parents started their married life in a shanty 14 feet

square. His father was a shiftless fellow, never succeeding at anything, unable either to read or to write. Of his mother President Lincoln said, "I owe everything that I am to her;" yet he believed her to be the illegitimate daughter of an unknown father, and she died in the floorless, doorless frontier cabin before her son was 10 years old.

Vindictive Politicians

It was distinctly for the people that he spent his life, and theirs, in the heart-breaking struggle against secession. Not to abolish slavery, but to save the Union, was his chief aim. And why was he so frantic to save the Union? Precisely because it was the one great and hopeful experiment in democratic government which all the world was watching, and which (in his own words) "gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of all men and that all should have an equal chance."

It was by these same plain people that he saved the Union, while defeating the timid, treacherous, vacillating

and vindictive politicians. When his re-election to the presidency seemed highly uncertain, one of his secretaries, the later celebrated John Hay, wrote: "I do not know whether the nation is worthy of him for another term. I know the people want him. There is no mistaking that fact."

"But the politicians are strong yet, and he is not their kind of a cat." The nation did prove worthy of him, however; and this was largely because he had given the common people a chance to get acquainted with him and his policies. He reached them in three ways: through his general receptions, which anyone might attend; through the open-door policy of his office, to which all the world was permitted access; and through his visits to the army. Many thousands of men and women, in one or another of these ways, met the President face to face, often in the high susceptibility of intense woe, and carried away an impression which was immediately circulated among all their acquaintances.

"I Will Support You"

It would be impossible to exaggerate the grotesque miscellany of the streams of people flowing ever in and out of the President's open doors. One day a large fleshy man, of a stern but homely countenance and a solemn and dignified carriage, immaculate dress—swallow-tail coat, ruffled shirt of faultless fabric, white cravat and orange colored gloves—entered with the throng. Looking at him, Lincoln was somewhat appalled. He expected some formidable demand. To his relief, the imposing stranger delivered a brief harangue on the President's policy, closing with, "I have watched you narrowly ever since your inauguration. . . . As one of your constituents, I now say to you, do in the future as you damn please, and I will support you." "Sit down, my friend," said Lincoln, "sit down. I am delighted to see you. Lunch with us today. Yes, you must stay and lunch with us, my friend, for I have not seen enough of you yet." There were many of these informal ambassadors of the people assuring the President of popular support. And this florid gentleman was not the only one who lunched with the President on first acquaintance.

When no one was lunching with him, and Mrs. Lincoln happened to be away, the chances were about even that he wouldn't bother to have any lunch.

Instead, he might do what he called "browsing around." But when his better (or at least more regular) half was present, if the President's home life were not run according to schedule, it was not her fault. One day the luncheon hour arrived in the midst of an important conference, with high officials. Presently a servant appeared reminding Mr. Lincoln of the hour, but he took no notice. Another summons, and again

LINCOLN WRONGED, SAYS IDA TARBELL

Biographer Thinks Dr. Brill
Erred in Saying He Was Fond
of Racy Stories.

Ida M. Tarbell, author and editor who has written several books on Abraham Lincoln, says she has never been able "to trace to him with evidence worth accepting a story I could not repeat to a decent-minded listener." Miss Tarbell has written for the Associated Press the following comment on a speech Friday by Dr. A. A. Brill in Toronto, in which the New York psychoanalyst called Lincoln a "schizoid manic personality." Dr. Brill found a trace of dual personality in a reputed tendency to tell off-color anecdotes.

By IDA M. TARBELL

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NEW YORK, June 6.—Dr. A. A. Brill's paper on Abraham Lincoln as a humorist is less formidable in its terminology and connotations than we usually get from scientific gentlemen. It is lively, interesting and understandable. I am not a psychiatrist, so not competent to deal with his interpretations of evidence, but as a long student of Lincoln's life I certainly did qualify somewhat certain evidence on which he depends. Take the

question of the character of the stories Lincoln told. Were they obscene? Dr. Brill is right in saying that at the worst they were extremely tame in comparison to what we hear nowadays on the stage and in the drawing rooms.

His stories undoubtedly were the type told in his time in the primitive and rather gross society from which he had sprung. That should be expected.

Not Easy to Change.

Probably they changed little throughout his life the Lincoln was never really at home in a society which had been subjected to the restraint and refinements imposed by what we call cultivation. He was too natural and honest; a human being easily to curb his tongue or change his ways.

It should be remembered, too, that in the Civil war it was the habit to tack his name on to all kinds of jokes and stories, even to publish collections gathered from right and left under the name of "Old Abe."

I have never been able to trace to him with evidence worth accepting a story I could not repeat to a decent-minded listener. I think it quite possible that when Dr. Holland said the whole West was full of his gross stories he was really saying that every ancient and obscene yarn retold was begun, to give it freshness—"Here's a new Lincoln story." It is a common enough habit.

I have sometimes suspected, too, that those who insisted on his grossness might have been finding what they looked for—and enjoyed—that it was rather their obscenity than his that was behind the story.

Father Not So Worthless.

There is another bit of evidence that Dr. Brill uses which needs qualification. In talking of Lincoln's father, Tom, he overlooks as did Senator Beveridge, his chief authority, the rather extensive documentary evidence collected and published by Dr. Louis Warren proving that Tom Lincoln was neither as illiterate or shiftless as most of his biographers would like to have us believe, a literary device to throw his son's greatness into still higher light, making him more of a "mystery."

Dr. Brill calls attention to Lincoln's refusal to visit his father in what proved to be his last illness, but he does not give the real reason. It was a good reason, all those who knew his wife, Mary Lincoln, and her ways agree. She was having a baby and would not allow Mr. Lincoln out of her sight; particularly would she have made it difficult for him to go to his father, for she detested the family, always objected to his seeing or helping them.

However, Dr. Brill has written a careful and interesting paper and, best of all, provocative.

Brill's Analysis Unfair, So Dr. Moreno Alleges

By Science Service.

TORONTO, June 6.—Agitation in psychiatric circles over Dr. A. A. Brill's psychoanalytic interpretation of Abraham Lincoln continues. Dr. J. T. Moreno of New York, has offered his own interpretation of Lincoln's personality.

Dr. Moreno protests strongly that it is unfair for a psychiatrist to analyze the character of a man now dead.

"Something is fundamentally wrong with the theory of psychoanalysis," Dr. Moreno said, "and the more unusual the personality, the more dangerous it is to apply the accepted formula as valid."

Most of the membership of the American Psychiatric association accepted Dr. Brill's carefully prepared study of Lincoln as a scientific contribution of merit.

LINCOLN LORE

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HUMOROUS LINES FROM LINCOLN

One who has a sense of humor approaches the Halloween season in the spirit of pleasantry. Lincoln's drollery which found expression in both his speeches and writings can be reviewed with interest during this period of gaiety.

Long Black Fellow

Lincoln often drew caricature word portraits of himself and was not in the least bit sensitive about his homely appearance. He had occasion once, in writing to a former acquaintance, to identify himself and used this interesting description: "Don't you remember a long black fellow who rode on horseback with you from Tremont to Springfield nearly ten years ago, swimming our horses over the Mackinaw on the trip? Well, I am that same one fellow yet."

Changing Coats

In attempting to show that the two major political parties have completely changed their opinions on some of the major political issues of the day, Lincoln wrote to a group of Boston citizens in charge of the Jefferson celebration in Boston as follows: "I remember being once much amused at seeing two partially intoxicated men engaged in a fight with their great-coats on, which fight, after a long and rather harmless contest, ended in each having fought himself out of his own coat and into that of the other. If the two leading parties of this day are really identical with the two in the days of Jefferson and Adams, they have performed the same feat as the two drunken men."

Accomplishing the Impossible

While delivering a speech in Congress on internal improvements, Lincoln illustrated the absurdity of a project by calling attention to the predicament of Patrick, who remarked about his new boots, "I shall never get 'em on, 'til I wear 'em a day or two, and stretch 'em a little."

All Things to All Men

On Lincoln's first visit to New England, he had occasion to mention the lack of specific statements in a newly organized political party's platform. He likened their position to a pair of pantaloons the Yankee peddler offered for sale, "Large enough for any man, small enough for any boy."

Second Fiddle

Baker, a Whig contemporary of Lincoln's, secured an appointment, which Lincoln wanted for himself and when he was chosen a delegate to work for Baker's election, Lincoln wrote to his friend Speed, "In getting Baker the nomination, I shall be fixed a good deal like a fellow who is made a groomsman to a man that has cut him out and is marrying his own dear 'gal'."

Delayed Judgment

A temperance address gave Lincoln an opportunity to illustrate the subject of threats and promises with this

typical Irish story: "Better lay down that spade you are stealing, Paddy, if you don't you'll pay for it at the day of judgment." Paddy, "By the power, if ye'll credit me so long I'll jist take another."

Itching Heels

In his sub-treasury speech made in Springfield in 1839, Lincoln felt that some of his political opponents were running away with the public funds. Although they claimed to be "sound in the head and the heart, but vulnerable in the heel," Lincoln admitted that the last claim was literally true and that, "this malady of 'running itch' in the heel, operated very much like the cork leg in the comic song did on its owner, which when he had once got started on it, the more he tried to stop it, the more it would run away."

Safety in Distance

A young man anxious to enter the military academy to which there was some family objection, received this written advice from Lincoln: "I think perhaps it might be wise to hand this letter from me, in to your good uncle through his room window after he has had a comfortable dinner, and watch its effect from the top of the pigeon house."

A Russian Bear

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates resulted in some interesting illustrations of repartee, one of which follows: "Just to think of it! Right at the outset of his canvass, I, a poor, kind, amiable, intelligent gentleman—I am to be slain in this way. Why, my friend the judge, is not only, as it turns out, not a dead lion, nor even a living one—he is the rugged Russian bear."

Wicked Chicago

In reply to a Chicago clergyman who came to Mr. Lincoln, stating that a message had come from his Divine Master commanding the President to free the slaves at once, Lincoln replied, "Well, now that's queer, I have been waiting a long time for that message. Don't you think it is rather strange that the Divine Master should have sent it around by way of wicked Chicago?"

Presidential Timber

The address which Abraham Lincoln made in the House of Representatives on July 27, 1848, contains more ludicrous similes and comparisons, than any other speech he ever delivered. In attempting to show that his political opponents had attempted to make all their presidential aspirants after the pattern of one of their early champions, he tells this story:

"A fellow once advertised that he had made a discovery by which he could make a new man out of an old one, and have enough of the stuff left to make a little yellow dog. Just such a discovery has General Jackson's popularity been to you. You not only twice made President of him out of it, but you have had enough of the stuff left to make Presidents of several comparatively small men since."



LITTLE KNOWN
LINCOLN
HUMOR



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Little Known Lincoln Humor

By *Louis A. Warren, Litt. D.*

Director Emeritus, The Lincoln National Life Foundation

LINCOLN'S fame as a humorist has been established largely by his ability to draw upon an inexhaustible store of anecdotes for illustrative purposes; but he was more than a story-teller. He was endowed naturally with a sense of humor which often found expression in tense and serious situations. This collection of authentic incidents in Lincoln's life is not a book of jokes, but a compilation of little-known episodes which reveal those deep-seated impulses accounting for Lincoln's quaint and pleasing humor.

Quizzing a Prospective Doorkeeper

AMONG the horde of applicants for patronage who advanced upon the White House, there were those who were seeking some of the most unimportant occupations about the capitol. They seemed to think that it was necessary to see the President himself about the positions they desired and in the midst of serious duties Lincoln was often bothered by their trivial requests.

There came to the Executive Mansion one day, an applicant for doorkeeper to the House. He happened to be one of those impossible individuals who would not fit into a place where any responsibility whatever would be involved, and Lincoln immediately began to plan his dismissal in as kindly a manner as possible. The conversation which followed was something like this:

"So you want to be doorkeeper to the House, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Well have you ever been a doorkeeper? Have you ever had any experience in doorkeeping?"

"Well, no—no actual experience, sir."

"Any theoretical experience? Any instructions in the duties and ethics of doorkeeping?"

"Um—no."

"Have you ever attended lectures on doorkeeping?"

"No, sir."

"Have you read any textbooks on the subject?"

"No."

"Have you conversed with anyone who has read such a book?"

"No."

"Well then, my friend, don't you see that you haven't a single qualification for this important post?" said Lincoln, in a reproachful tone.

"Yes, I do," said the applicant, and he took leave humbly, almost gratefully.

An Offended God and a Lightning Rod

ABRAHAM LINCOLN made his first political speech in Springfield, Illinois, and had as an opponent on the platform George Forquer, who, having recently changed his politics, secured a lucrative government appointment. Forquer's home had been equipped with lightning rods, the first in the city, and Lincoln had observed this new improvement on the way to the political meeting.

Representatives of both parties spoke in turn from the same platform, and it fell to the task of Forquer to answer Lincoln. He opened his remarks by saying "This young man must be taken

down, and I am truly sorry that the task devolves upon me." With a show of egotism and superiority he attacked Lincoln with a line of sarcasm for which he was famous, and concluded by ridiculing Lincoln's appearance as well as his arguments.

Lincoln did not seem to be greatly offended by the discourteous remarks, but as soon as Forquer had closed and the opportunity to reply was given, he went to the platform, answered the arguments of his opponent, and then closed with this statement: "The gentleman commenced his speech by saying that 'this young man,' alluding to me, 'must be taken down.' I am not so young in years as I am in the tricks and trades of a politician, but," said he, pointing to Forquer, "live long or die young, I would rather die now than, like the gentleman, change my politics and with the change receive an office worth three thousand dollars a year, and then feel obliged to erect a lightning rod over my house to protect a guilty conscience from an offended God."

An Itemized Appraisal

A LETTER of inquiry which Lincoln received about the financial status of a ne'er-do-well was answered as follows:

"Yours of the 10th received. First of all, he has a wife and baby; together they ought to be worth \$500,000 to any man. Secondly, he has an office in which there is a table worth \$1.50 and three chairs worth, say, \$1. Last of all, there is in one corner a large rat-hole which will bear looking into."

A Saucy Little Woman

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, by virtue of his office as President, became Commander in Chief of the Nation's military forces. Even in the serious business of issuing orders in the grim struggle which followed there was occasionally a bit of humor expressed.

Pressure was often brought to bear upon him to make certain military appointments and promotions, so that he was ever besieged with all kinds of requests. One day the wife of an officer appeared on behalf of her husband with a vigorous appeal for his promotion to brigadier-general. She became very insistent in her demands which finally resulted in Lincoln's sending a note to Secretary of War Stanton, with this comment: "Hon. Secretary of War: On this day, Mrs. called upon me. She is the wife of Major of the regular army. She wants her husband made a brigadier-general. She is a saucy little woman and I think she will torment me until I have to do it."

No Vices — No Virtues

LINCOLN'S lone companion in a stagecoach leaving Springfield, Illinois, for Indiana early one morning was a Kentuckian, unknown to Lincoln, on his way home from a visit in the West. After they had traveled a short distance the stranger offered Lincoln a chew of a tobacco twist. "No, sir, thank you, I never chew," Lincoln said. Later in the morning, the gentleman took from his pocket a fine leather case, which he opened, and offered Lincoln a cigar. This also Lincoln politely declined, remarking at the same time that he never smoked.

The day wore on, and as they neared the stage station where a stop was to be made for dinner, the Kentuckian took a flask from his satchel with the remark, "Well stranger, seeing you do not smoke or chew, perhaps you'll take a little French brandy. It's a fine article and a good appetizer, besides." Lincoln found it necessary to decline this last best evidence of Kentucky hospitality on the same ground that had caused him to reject the tobacco.

That evening when they reached a point where they made connections for different stages, the Kentuckian shook Lincoln warmly by the hand. "See here, stranger," he said, good humor-

edly, "you're a clever, but strange companion. I may never see you again, and I don't want to offend you, but I want to say this: my experience has taught me that a man who has no vices has blamed few virtues! Good-day."

Lincoln, many times in his career, when he was invited to accept tokens of hospitality in which he did not indulge, would refer with much merriment to his Kentucky friend, with some statement about the stranger hitting the nail on the head.

A Small "Nubbin"

Lincoln once had an appointment to meet a committee of which Alexander Stephens was a member. It was a raw spring day, and Stephens, a very small man, was wearing several extra wraps when he arrived. Lincoln observed him in the process of removing several coats and after the last overcoat had been removed the President said to Secretary Seward "Well, I lived in a corn country all my life, but I never saw before so many husks for such a little nubbin."

A Prospective Vice President Humiliated

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S name was before the first National Republican Convention as a candidate for the nomination of Vice President of the United States. The convention assembled at Philadelphia in June 1856. At this time Lincoln was in attendance at a special term of the Champaign Circuit Court which began at Urbana on Tuesday, June 17, with Judge Davis on the bench. The judge and a few of the lawyers were putting up at a hotel where the landlady summoned them to breakfast by the ringing of a loud bell. The men thought they were being aroused too early, so they decided to get possession of the bell and con-

ceal it during the term of court. By a majority vote, Lincoln was chosen to carry out the decree about removing the bell.

On the morning the decision was made, a little earlier than usual, just before noon, Lincoln was seen to leave the courtroom. This indicated to the other members of the bar that he was going to fulfill his assignment. He hastened to the hotel, and as soon as an opportunity presented itself, slipped unobserved into the dining room and secreted the bell under his coat. He was just in the act of making off with the bell when Judge Davis and Lawyer Whitney, two of the conspirators, came into the hotel, the former holding in his hand a copy of the *Chicago Tribune* which had just reached town. It contained the news that Abraham Lincoln had received 110 votes (not enough for election) as a nominee for Vice President at the Philadelphia convention.

"Great business this," chuckled Davis, slyly calling attention to Lincoln's bulging coat, "for a man who aspires to be Vice-President of the United States." Lincoln only smiled as he still tried to keep the breakfast bell concealed and remarked with reference to the Philadelphia vote: "Surely it ain't me; there's a great man named Lincoln down in Massachusetts; I reckon it's him."

Don't Shoot

THE Secretary of War was continually complaining about Lincoln's weakness in granting pardons and showing clemency when the lives of condemned men were at stake. Even here we find occasionally an order similar to this one: "Colonel Mulligan: If you haven't shot Barney D--- yet—don't."

Lincoln's "Certificate of Moral Character"

WHEN Lincoln left Springfield, Illinois, for Washington to assume his duties as President, his inaugural address was placed in a satchel which was to be guarded with extra attention. It was placed in the care of the President-elect's oldest son, Robert.

Somehow it was lost, and with deep concern Lincoln approached one of his body-guards and said, "Lamon, I guess I have lost my certificate of moral character, written by myself. Bob has lost the gripsack containing my inaugural address."

Another search was made which led to the baggage room. Upon arriving there, Lincoln observed a bag which he thought was his, but upon opening it found a soiled shirt, some paper collars, and a bottle of whiskey. However, later on the satchel was discovered in a pile of baggage, and once again the first inaugural address was safely in the hands of its author.

This incident caused much merriment after the satchel was found and of course it reminded Lincoln of a story. He said: "I once knew a fellow who had saved up fifteen hundred dollars, and had placed it in a private banking establishment. The bank soon failed, and he afterwards received ten per cent of his investment. He then took his one hundred and fifty dollars and deposited it in a savings bank, where he was sure it would be safe. In a short time this bank also failed, and he received at the final settlement ten per cent on the amount deposited. When the fifteen dollars was paid over to him, he held it in his hand and looked at it thoughtfully, then he said: 'Now, darn you! I have got you reduced to a portable shape, so I'll put you in my pocket.' "

Suiting the action to the word, Mr. Lincoln took his address from the bag and carefully placed it in the inside pocket of his vest, but held on to the satchel with as much interest as if it still contained his "certificate of moral character" written by himself.

A Member of the Aristocracy

FOUR months after Lincoln married Mary Todd, a convention was held in Sangamon County for the purpose of selecting the county's choice for the congressional nomination. There was another aspirant for the nomination from Sangamon—Lincoln's friend, Edward D. Baker. Two factors, one positive and the other negative, were largely responsible for Lincoln's failure to win the support of the party at the county convention. First, he had recently married an aristocrat; second, he did not belong to a church.

Lincoln got a big laugh out of the attempt to put him among the aristocrats and wrote to a friend, "It would astonish if not amuse the older citizens to learn that I (a strange, friendless, uneducated, penniless boy, working on a flatboat at ten dollars per month) have been put down here as a candidate of pride, wealth, and aristocratic family distinction. Yet so, chiefly, it was."

Nevertheless, much against his wishes, he was made one of the county delegates to the district convention to help Baker get the nomination. He wrote with reference to this appointment: "I shall be fixed a good deal like a fellow who is made groomsman to a man that has cut him out, and is marrying his own dear gal."



*I am, in height,
six feet four inches, nearly;
lean in flesh, weighing on an
average one hundred and eighty
pounds; dark complexion, with
coarse black hair and gray eyes.
No other marks or brands recol-
lected.*

A. Lincoln

LINCOLN NATIONAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

IN DAYS GONE BY

Mrs. James Tribune
2/12/37

Recall That Lincoln Had Patronage Troubles, Too

Find Comfort In Anecdotes

Congressmen Relate His Stories.

WASHINGTON, D. C. (P)—Patronage-hounded congressmen found comfort Friday in recalling, on Abraham Lincoln's birthday, that he, too, had trouble with job hunters.

One representative, browsing among the Lincolniana in the library of congress, discovered this anecdote:

An administration senator early in the civil war, noting Lincoln appeared dejected, inquired:

"Have you heard bad news from Fort Sumter?"

It's Postoffice.

"No," answered the president sadly, "it's the postoffice at Jonesville, Mo."

Lawmakers submerged by repeated visits of the same constituent related the story about Lincoln's persistent bald-headed caller from Philadelphia.

"Did you ever try this stuff on your hair?" asked the president, taking a bottle from a cabinet.

"No," said the visitor, "I haven't."

"Well, do so," continued Lincoln, "and come back in eight or ten months and tell me how it works."

Rid of One Fellow.

He got rid of him—for eight or ten months.

Long-suffering listeners to the intricate legislative proposals of colleagues told of Lincoln's patience with Robert Dale Owen, the spiritualist, who read him a long manuscript.

Asked how he liked it, the president replied:

"Well, for those who like that sort of thing, I should think it is just the sort of thing they would like."

Gifted With Laughter

Purple Death Took Him, and a Mighty Fate

11-89

By Claire MacMurray

IF IN your life, as in the average, the proportion of happiness to unhappiness is only slightly less than one-third, you should be content for you have your share. If in your life, as in Lincoln's, the proportion of happiness is vastly lower than that, it may comfort you to consider how often "life feeds on adversity, and death on pleasure and repose."

Lincoln's daily life was a dark tapestry woven of humiliating failures and bitter griefs; of small disappointments and great discords. Against this somber background he stands, a bold and lonely man gifted with tolerance and laughter.

He is quoted as saying "I laugh that I may not cry," but even the casual student of his life must realize that he used laughter as our mothers used the hairpin—not only for convenience and adornment, but as a weapon, as a key to locked doors, as a repair tool, and just because.

Often he eased the emotional tension of a group by evoking laughter. He read a piece of Artemus Ward's to the cabinet before presenting the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. When a trouble maker reported that Stanton had called Lincoln a fool, Lincoln laughed and said "Stanton is a very able man. If he said that it must be true."

He replied to a slanderous attack by the Jacobins (his fervent enemies, organized to discredit him) with the story of the Irishmen who, walking near a lonely pool, heard for the first time in their lives the sweet song of a bullfrog. In terror they looked "to see the sound they heard" but could find nothing. "Sure," said one finally, "and in my opinion it's nothing but a noise."

Lincoln used laughter as an apology for his acts of mercy, which certain of his generals thought too frequent. "I don't believe," he said upon pardoning a condemned soldier, "that shooting would do him much good." And another time: "I'll leave it to you to decide. If God attaches a man to a cowardly pair of legs, how can he help their running away with him?"

His humor wasn't always kindly. He caricatured his enemies, mocked his rivals, ridiculed certain pompous members of his own party. Once he imitated an opponent in a debate so mercilessly—his voice, his walk, his mannerisms—that the poor wretch burst into tears. He rid himself of a bald-headed bore who had repeatedly imposed upon him by presenting him with a bottle of hair tonic. "Please accept this, sir," Lincoln said with a bow. "It will grow hair on a pumpkin. Go home and begin at once. Persevere. Come back in six months and report. Good day."

Often he laughed just for fun. Consider his favorite story of the dog which swallowed a lighted bomb and was scattered about the countryside. "Rover was a good dog," it went, "but as a dog his days of usefulness are probably over."

"Purple death took him, and a mighty fate," but he met them steadfastly, upheld by courage, buoyed by laughter.

LINCOLN LORE

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HOOSIER HUMOR

The recent passing of George Ade, who was born the year after Lincoln died, closes a life span of these two Hoosier humorists of over a century and a quarter. Ade's demise, coming so shortly after the death of Irving Cobb, who lived just across the Ohio River from Indiana, makes it appropriate to gather a few notations under the title, *Hoosier Humor*.

The Lincoln National Life Foundation recently acquired a large plastic panel containing the full length figures of six humorists, who have been brought together in an informal study. The artist, Jullian Lee Rayford, has called the portrait, "The Great American Humorists of the 19th Century." The six men included in this illustrious company of laughter-makers are Bret Harte, Mark Twain, James Whitcomb Riley, Abraham Lincoln, Josh Billings, and Artemus Ward, named in this order according to the positions, from left to right, which they occupy in the Rayford portrait.

Possibly we should have used the term "a half dozen humorists" rather than the specific number six, because it carries with it the idea of speaking in round numbers. The artist must have had this in mind, for under the inscription identifying the figures, is this notation: "P.S. Bill Nye was here but he's out to lunch right now."

The two Hoosiers, Riley and Lincoln, occupy the center of the study, where Lincoln towers above the others with his right arm resting on Riley, and his left hand on the shoulder of Artemus Ward. The entire group is presented in a story telling pose, each with some peculiar physical or property stamp to identify him.

The panel also contains a brief quotation from each humorist:—"Did you ever have the measles, if so; how many?" A. Ward.—"Be virtuous and you will be eccentric." M. Twain.—"The heathen Chinese is peculiar." B. Harte.—"The goblin 'll get you." Riley.—"If I did not laugh I should die." Lincoln.—"Good for 90 daze, yours without a struggle." J. Billings.

The expression taken from Lincoln's words about laughing, recalls that in his much quoted farewell letter, Irving Cobb mentioned his book, *Exit Laughing*. While Lincoln may not have contemplated that his exit from life would find him laughing, the fact is he was witnessing a comedy at the time of his assassination and in his last conscious moments he must have been smiling at least.

If we were to choose Lincoln's favorite half dozen humorists, we would select J. G. Baldwin, Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward), David Ross Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby), C. G. Halpine, Joe Miller, and R. N. Newell (Orpheus C. Kerr). Lincoln's interest in many of the humorists rested in their ability to make him laugh, as he is reported to have said during the war that "laughter is my anecdote for tears."

While the Lincoln student may be interested in the humorists that made Lincoln laugh, most people are more familiar with Lincoln himself as the story teller. Often, in starting to tell a story, Lincoln would preface his remarks with "As my old father used to say." It was during the fourteen Hoosier years that Lincoln received his tutoring in humor, under the direction of his story telling father.

It is very difficult to organize with any degree of satisfaction, data which might fall under the general caption of Lincoln Humor. The first problem is to sort out the spurious from the genuine. Don Marquis in the *Saturday*

Evening Post, of fifteen years ago, stated, "I developed a bad habit of inventing Lincoln stories . . . When I couldn't find anything better to fill up my column, I used to invent a story and attribute it to Lincoln." We wonder how many columnists have been just as industrious as Don Marquis.

After having done sufficient culling of the fake stories by observing the time element, and internal evidence, the first division of importance is to separate the stories told about Lincoln from the stories told by Lincoln. The first division, although they may be of a humorous nature, belong, in reality, in a biographical classification, this also applies to stories which Lincoln may have told about himself or his autobiographical references. A large part of the humorous data about Lincoln should be gathered under biography.

The anecdote, yarn, tale, fable, or whatever term we may apply to incidents, real or imaginary, which Lincoln used for so many varied purposes, should be surveyed from an entirely different viewpoint.

The organization of the anecdotes themselves is an interesting and enlightening pursuit, and reveals the genius of Lincoln's humor, which can be gained in no other way. Here are some of the caption heads that might guide one in such a quest and which present some of the objectives for which Lincoln used his matchless power of story telling.

Objectives in Lincoln's Story Telling

ENTERTAINMENT.—The primitive cracker box type, which also extends over into the circuit riding days.

RIDICULE.—A devastating instrument used in the early political canvasses.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—A substitute for definition, and laborious explanation.

DIPLOMACY.—To relieve tension, remove barriers, dismiss applicants, evade decisions, forestall demands.

SOCIABILITY.—A medium for putting at ease those brought into his company.

STIMULATION.—To arouse the inert and to cheer the discouraged.

Laughter apparently served as a stimulant to Lincoln himself and in seasons when he seemed to be in the very depths of despondency he would himself become the story teller or seek some source of humor which would lift him out of remorse and nerve him for another trial. Often his humor was confused with what his critics referred to as a ribald and degenerating amusement and his reputation suffered from these exaggerations, especially during the latter part of the war.

This story about the efficacy of Lincoln's prayers is timely. Two women of the Quaker faith, during the rebellion, were discussing the probable outcome of the war. One said, "I think that Davis will succeed." When she was asked the reason for her opinion she stated, "Because Davis is a praying man." "And so is Lincoln, a praying man," her friend replied. The final retort, however, seemed to be convincing: "Yes, but the Lord will think Lincoln is joking."

Abe Lincoln, If Alive Today, Would Succeed as Gag Writer

BY LLOYD LEWIS

IN ADDITION to his greater talents, Abraham Lincoln had a gift that, were he alive today, and not employed in government, would have made him a fortune as a gag writer for radio comedians. Insisting that he never coined any of his famous stories, he nevertheless had what the best of the radio humor writers have today, an artistic ability to rearrange, condense, rephrase and sharpen folk-jokes and comic situations into a form that was all his own.

His stories were helped immeasurably, when he told them, by his own amazing talent for quizzical, droll comedy—a delivery perhaps as funny as Mark Twain's, a use of facial expression perhaps as irresistible as Charlie Chaplin's.

He practically never employed humor except to illustrate a point that had come up in conversation and he apparently usually used a drawl for comic effect. Nevertheless, the point of his humor characteristically came with the same crisp, crackling speed used by the highest salaried gag writers today.

At a church meeting the rival candidates for Congress, the Rev. Peter Cartright and Lincoln, appeared before the voters. The preacher spoke first and insinuated strongly that his opponent was an agnostic, a heretic and possibly an infidel. Lincoln waited patiently. The preacher said, "Now, will all those who are going to heaven stand up?" All rose but Lincoln. Cartright turned in triumph at having thus linked Lincoln and Satan, and cried, "And Mr. Lincoln, where are you going?"

Lincoln stood up and said, "I'm going to Congress."

Came Up Dry

Once he and a friend were discussing a profound, solemn, celebrated historian of their time. The friend said, "It may be doubted whether any man of our generation has plunged more deeply in the sacred fount of learning." Lincoln quipped, "Or come up dryer."

Lincoln told of a friend who, when named to examine and inspect the state prisons, gave the first penitentiary so conscientious and thorough an inspection that he got lost in the dungeon corridors down among the prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment. He stepped up to the bars of one cell and said to a convict, "Excuse me, but how do you get out of this place?"

When a pompous statesman was buried with extravagant ceremonies in Washington, Lincoln observed, "If he'd known what a big funeral he was going to have he'd have died long ago."

When one of his brother lawyers on the circuit tore the seat of his trousers, joking colleagues started signing a subscription to buy him a new pair of pants. Lincoln looked over the list of names and then solemnly wrote, "I can contribute

nothing to the end in view."

Gingerbread Boy

When asked why he seemed to avoid women, Lincoln explained that he was like a neighbor boy in Indiana who had been poorer than the Lincolns were. This boy came over one day to where young Abe was eating gingerbread men, the greatest treat on the frontier. He asked for one of the men. Abe gave it to him, then for another which Abe was starting to consume. Abe gave him that and the boy wolfed it down.

"You seem to like gingerbread," said Abe.

The boy replied: "Abe, I don't s'pose anybody on earth likes gingerbread better—and gets less."

When asked how his wife's aristocratic Southern family, the Todds, spelled their name, with one or two "ds," he answered, "Two. One was enough for God but not the Todds."

Lincoln told of a father who kept urging his big, bashful son to take a wife until the young man finally burst out bawling, "All right, whose wife will I take?"

Once when he was confined to his office by the contagious but not serious disease, varioloid, his secretary told him that the outer office was full of those chronic beggars for political favors, the Congressmen.

"Throw open the doors; let 'em in," said the President. "At last I've got something I can give 'em."



Lincoln Tale

Col. Samuel C. Willson of Crawfordsville was a strong lawyer in Indiana during the period when attorneys "rode the circuits" and met at various county taverns at night to tell stories and play seven-up. Willson was a large, gruff man, yet extremely kind-hearted.

In his early manhood he was called to a town in Illinois on business. The weather was very cold, and when he arrived at the only tavern in town, he found a company of strange lawyers forming a circle around a stove in the office. None of them appeared to notice his entrance; no room was offered him by the fire.

"Well, well," he bellowed in his heavy, gruff voice, "you're a beautiful set of fellows—a handsome lot for Illinois." As he spoke, he shook great clouds of snow from his shaggy overcoat.

A gaunt, bony man of immense stature slowly lifted himself from one of the chairs. Willson was six feet tall, but this man towered over him. "Stranger," he said to Willson, "we were discussing our looks just as you entered, and we agreed that if an uglier man than I came in here tonight we'd murder him on the spot. Landlord," he called in a louder voice, "fetch here your meat ax; the monster has arrived!"

A roar of laughter greeted this speech, and a few minutes later Colonel Willson was delightedly listening to stories by Abraham Lincoln, the tallest man of the company.

MRS. MONA MERRY, SELLERSBURG,
IND., FROM "STORIES OF INDIANA."

Courier Journal Louisville, Ky. 2-10-52

EDWIN
FINCH

by

KENTUCKIANA ALL OVER

HUMOR OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN HAS KEPT HIS COUNTRYMEN AMUSED EVER SINCE

In Humility, He Often Turned the Joke on Himself and, Like Will Rogers, Avoided Jests That Were Bitter or Would Hurt Others—In Politics, a Humorous Answer Often Won the Argument.

BY WARREN H. GRIFFITH.
(A Member of The Star's Staff.)

ONE side of Abraham Lincoln's life that never grows old in the telling is that expressed in his jokes and humorous anecdotes. The serious expression he often wore beneath his stovepipe hat seemed to deny he was a humorist. Yet in spite of the tragedy that involved him and the grave years he spent in the White House, his great sense of humor is one of the things that make it certain he will live forever in the nation's hall of fame.

When Carl Sandburg wrote his biography of Lincoln he made effective use of the humorous side of Lincoln's career. "The Prairie Years," published almost a quarter-century ago by Harcourt, Brace & Co. as the first half of the complete biography, includes numerous examples of the rustic humor enjoyed by Lincoln.

Among the first business ventures of Abe Lincoln was the peddling of notions and knickknacks at farm houses. This was undertaken along the way when he and his father were moving by ox wagon from Hardin County, Kentucky, to a new home in Macon County, Illinois. Abe Lincoln was then 21 years old.

Retreat of a Peddler.

One day he approached a farm that seemed to the young Lincoln to be "full of nothing but children." The mother, redheaded and redfaced, clutched a whip in her hand. The father, meek and tow-headed, stood in the doorway as Lincoln approached. The wife saw the young stranger, pushed her husband aside and asked what was wanted.

"Nothing, madam," Lincoln answered, "I merely dropped in to see how things were going."

"Well, you needn't," the woman snapped out. "There's trouble here and lots of it, but I kin manage without the help of outsiders. This is jest a family row, but I'll teach these brats their places ef I have to lick the hide off every one of 'em. I don't do much talkin' but I run this house, so I don't want no one sneakin' round trying to find out how I do it."

Lincoln recognized that the best strategy under the circumstances was a dignified retreat.

Abe's wit was not long in being recognized at New Salem, Ill., where he and his father established their new home. He became a clerk in a new store,

sheep, and Tom Watkin's boy killed the dog; old John Mounts tanned the dogskin and Sally Spears made the gloves. That's how I know they're dogskin."

Trials of a Postmaster.

In 1833 Lincoln was named postmaster, a job he wanted so he might read the newspapers. He came to know people always asking for a letter and acting as if the government were holding back a letter for them. The story went that he met an Irishman who asked, "Is there a letter for me?" "What's the name," Lincoln asked. "Beggory, an' ye'll find the name on the letter," replied the Irishman.

When more than a decade later Lincoln was elected to the House of Representatives and went to Washington to take his seat in Congress, he became known as a storyteller. The House postoffice was a favorite meeting place of yarn spinners.

him out of it, but you have had enough of the stuff left to make Presidents out of several comparatively small men since; and it is your chief reliance now to make still another."

A virtue of the Lincoln wit was that he enjoyed turning it upon himself. One of the subjects of that wit was his lanky stature. Once when the Lincoln cow went dry, he stepped over to borrow some milk from Jim Gourley, his neighbor. Gourley recalled:

"He used to come with his feet in a pair of loose slippers, wearing old, faded trousers fastened with one suspender. Our rooms were low and one day he said, 'Jim, you'll have to lift your loft a little higher; I can't straighten out under it very well.' To my wife, who was short, he used to say that little people had advantages; they required 'less wood and wool to make them comfortable.'"



Solemn Pictures Hide Lincoln's Great Humor

William Allen Young 2-12-53

By ARTHUR EDSON

Associated Press Staff Writer

Washington, Feb. 12 — Nearly all, if not all, the pictures of this tall, gaunt President show an incredibly melancholy man, burdened with an almost overpowering loneliness.

Certainly nowhere in the pictures is there anything to hint that Abraham Lincoln had a laugh, as one man described it, as unrestrained as the neigh of a wild horse.

Nor do the pictures suggest this description:

"His features were lighted, his eyes radiant, he responded to sundry remarks humorously, then dryly, and thenceforward was cordial and hearty."

Tedious Process

Posing for pictures was a tedious process. Robert Lincoln said his father invariably lapsed into melancholy during the ordeal.

Discovery of what may be another photo of Lincoln, long unrecognized, was announced yesterday by Wayne C. Grover, archivist of the United States. The picture is a scene at Gettysburg, Pa., on the day of Lincoln's address, taken by Matthew Brady, noted Civil War photographer. Grover said one figure has tentatively been identified as Lincoln.

Had the flashbulb been around in those days, enabling alert photographers to catch each fleeting change in expression, the pictorial record - and possibly our impressions of Lincoln - might be different.

Again, maybe it is just as well the flashbulb came later.

For the truth is, we Americans don't like too much levity in our chief executives. A sense of humor, yes; but we want it well under control.

'Coarse Comedian'

Lincoln's love of a good story brought repeated charges that he was a buffoon, a coarse comedian who laughed as men died on the battlefield.

Lincoln kept right on telling stories.

Today, on his birthday, let's sample some of his humor, picked out of Carl Sandburg's splendid biography.

Describing an orator, Lincoln said: "He can compress the most words into the smallest ideas of any man I ever met."

Again, Lincoln pictured a windbag "who mounted to the rostrum,

threw back his head, shined his eyes, and left the consequences to God."

An old friend, a congressman, got this reception: "Come in here and tell me what you know. It won't take long."

A woman who asked him to intercede with the War Department was told:

Human Part of Him

"It's of no use, madam, for me to go. They do things in their own way over there, and I don't amount to pig tracks in the War Department."

Lincoln's humor was a part of him, and it became an increasingly important part as the Civil War wore on.

Congressman Isaac N. Arnold once chided him for joking when the war looked bleakest. Arnold then heard something that fits in better with the photos we have of Lincoln.

"Mr. Arnold," the President cried, "If I could not get momentary respite from the crushing burden I am constantly carrying, my heart would break!"

Lincoln's Sense of Humor

Kept Heart From Breaking

By ARTHUR EDSON

Associated Press Staff Writer

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Lincoln looked upon himself as a retailer, not a manufacturer, of stories.

One involved a preacher attempting to sell a Bible to a woman in the hills. She said she had one. Where? the preacher asked. A big search began, and finally a couple of leaves of the Bible were found.

The preacher insisted this was no Bible, and the woman insisted it was.

"But," she contended, "I had no idea we were so nearly out."

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Lincoln Valued Humor, Used It in Easing Grave Crises

Washington Daily Times 2-12-53

No known photograph, portrait or memorial depicts Abraham Lincoln as smiling. To most of us he is the brooding, melancholy figure of the Lincoln Memorial.

Thousands who today stand before the somber statue and other monuments would be surprised to learn that his contemporaries often charged Lincoln with unseemly levity in times of grave crises while he served as President.

True, there was a vein of melancholy in his sensitive makeup. Some writers have described his face as the saddest they ever witnessed. The sorrows and the frustrations of the great Civil War struggle hung heavily on his shoulders.

Richard Hanser once wrote in the Lions Club magazine, that Lincoln's sense of humor which seemed to have been one of his assets from early life, served as a bulwark against the bitter and bloody disasters of the Civil War.

The story Lincoln enjoyed most telling about himself involved two Quaker women discussing the outcome of the war between the states.

"I think Jefferson Davis will succeed," said the first, "because Jefferson is a praying man."

"And so is Abraham Lincoln a praying man," said the second.

"Yes, but the Lord will think Abraham Lincoln is joking."

Lincoln first made a name for himself as an able, astute lawyer, but he won just as much fame for his jokes and stories as his skill in the courtroom. Whenever court proceedings got tedious, judges were in the habit of turning to Lincoln for something with which to liven up the proceedings.

When he entered the national arena of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, his inexhaustible humor became a political asset that helped

him score off his opponent and won him support. Once when Douglas called Lincoln "a two-faced man," Lincoln turned to Douglas, smiled and said: "I leave it to my audience, if I had another face, do you think I would wear this one?"

When Lincoln reached the White House it became apparent that for him humor was far more than mere tomfoolery and empty clowning. He used it as a buttress and a shield against the cares and irritations of office. Driven almost to distraction by the hordes of job-seekers, he found that a joke or a comical remark was the only possible defense.

* * *

One time a delegation plagued the President to appoint a certain man diplomatic representative to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), urging that their candidate was ailing and would benefit by the salubrious climate.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," Lincoln replied, "but there are eight other applicants for the place and they are all sicker than your man."

His reservoir of stories helped Lincoln stay serene under the public abuse to which he was often subjected. When an old Springfield friend asked him how it felt to be President of the United States, he replied:

"You've heard about the man who was tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail? Well, when a man in the crowd asked him how he liked it, he replied, 'If it wasn't for the honor of the thing, I'd rather walk.'"

Hanser points out that there were many who mistook Lincoln's joking for callousness, especially when the jokes continued to flow in the most tragic days of the war. The hostile press and his political opponents hung the epithet of "buffoon" on him. But those who knew him understood that his hu-

mor was a dike which served to hold back the darkness that threatened to engulf him.

* * *

On Sept. 22, 1862, the war cabinet was summoned to the White House for a special session. He then read to the group a now almost forgotten skit called "High-Handed Outrage at Utica," by Artemus Ward. Some of the cabinet members were furious, but Lincoln read on and at the end laughed heartily.

Then he said: "Gentlemen, why don't you laugh? With the fearful strain that is upon me night and day, if I did not laugh I should die, and you need this medicine as much as I do."

Then Lincoln reached into his tall hat and pulled out a paper from which he read. It was the Emancipation Proclamation. Secretary of War Stanton was overwhelmed. He got up, took Lincoln by the hand and said: "Mr. President, if reading a chapter of Artemus Ward is a prelude to such a deed as this, the book should be filed among the archives of the nation and the author canonized."

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1399

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

January 30, 1956

LINCOLN AND LAUGHTER

Several years ago the Foundation secured a plaster panel, 50 inches by 25 inches, which portrays in full length, figures of six American humorists: Bret Harte, Mark Twain, James Whitcomb Riley, Abraham Lincoln, Josh Billings and Artemus Ward. Physically at least, Lincoln towers above the group. On the panel there are brief comments of the humorists and credited to Lincoln is the statement: "If I did not laugh I should die."

The leading article in a recent number of the *Saturday Evening Post*, entitled "The Land Where Laughs are Born," presents Kentucky as the state of the story teller and several of her favored sons are introduced who have excelled in the art of humor. Among the earlier generations the names of Watterson, Cobb and the still active Barkley appear. A contemporary picture of a younger group at a story telling bee at Lexington contains at least four Kentuckians known to Lincoln students: Thomas Clark, J. Winston Coleman, Jr., Holman Hamilton and William A. Townsend.

Lincoln is featured in the monograph as the outstanding humorist among the Presidents and a portrait of him is displayed with the citation: "Abraham Lincoln's story telling powers was part of his Kentucky birth-right." The author of this comment might have documented the affirmation with this statement, left standing when Lincoln corrected one of the early campaign biographies:

"From his father came that knack of story telling which has made him so delightful among acquaintances and so irresistible in his stump and forensic drolleries." Time and again in introducing some bit of humor Lincoln would begin, "as my old father used to say" then would follow some pioneer witticism coming from the senior Lincoln. These were probably reminiscences of the early days when Abe and his father were together for twenty-one years.

When the Lincolns moved from Indiana to Illinois it is very evident that they did not leave behind them their sense of humor. The life on the eighth judicial circuit was made merry by the stories of Abraham Lincoln and they are legion. One of the county seats where both Hoosiers and Suckers gathered around the open fireplace for an evening of laughter was the McCormick Hotel at Danville, Ill., near the Indiana line. Ward H. Lamon, friend of Lincoln conducted his law office in this town.

There has just come into the hands of the editor of *Lincoln Lore* a pamphlet published in 1910 at Danville entitled *Story of a Store*. It was distributed by the Woodbury Drug Co. on its 50th anniversary. Previous to 1860 the firm's name was Sconce and Woodbury. The pamphlet mentions a day book which reveals Lincoln traded with the firm and Doctor Woodbury states that on one occasion Lincoln left "an order for the funny book of those days viz: *Phoenixiana*," or as the subtitle states: "Sketches and Burlesques by John Phoenix." *Lincoln Lore* (No. 511) once published a compilation of titles which were designated as the important source books of Lincoln's humor. *Phoenixiana* was not included but apparently should be added to the list. The Foundation is fortunate in having a copy of this rather scarce item, it having been purchased in Long Beach, Cal., not far from where it was published.

Lincoln must have been amused at the frontispiece autographed, "Yours respectfully John P. Squibob." Under this signature is this printed note: "The autograph may be relied on as authentic, as it is written by one of Mr. Squibob's most intimate friends." Squibob as portrayed by the frontispiece is a laughing man with extremely long nose and large pointed ears. The book was copyrighted in 1855 and the tenth edition bears the date 1856 so it must have been widely distributed during its first year. It was dedicated to Dr. Charles M. Hitchcock of San Francisco and most of the monologues are oriented in either San Francisco or in San Diego, the city where it was published.

The first chapter of the book would be of special interest to any one like Lincoln who had been a surveyor and who was familiar with the various instruments used. They served as leads to numerous puns which were then popular vehicles for the humorist. Referring to the surveying party Phoenix said: "Each employee was furnished with a gold chronometer watch, and, by a singular mistake, a diamond pin and a gold chain; for direction having been given that they should be furnished with 'chains and pins' meaning of course such articles as are used in surveying." Each surveyor was instructed "to set his watch by Greenwich meantime, which though excellent to give one the longitude, is for ordinary purposes the meanest time that can be found."

The chapter on astronomy must have aroused memories in the mind of Lincoln having been interested in that science when but a youth. After commenting on Isaac Newton observing an apple fall from a tree, with his subsequent discovery of the law of gravitation, Phoenix concluded: "Thus we see that as an apple originally brought sin and ignorance into the world, the same fruit proved thereafter the cause of vast knowledge and enlightenment . . . had the fallen fruit been a pear an orange or a peach, there is little doubt that Newton would have eaten it up and thought no more of the subject."

Phoenix elaborated on the moon and stated that upon the latest advice no one had succeeded in reaching it. He ventures: "Should any one do so hereafter, it will probably be a woman as the sex will never cease making an exertion for that purpose as long as there is a man in it."

This further comment about the moon must have been appreciated by Lincoln especially in later years: "We may consider the moon an excellent institution, among the many we enjoy under a free republican form of government, and it is a blessed thing to reflect that the President of the United States cannot veto it."

During the afternoon of Lincoln's last day he was entertaining some Illinois friends, among them former Governor Richard J. Oglesby. Miss Ida M. Tarbell at one time had before her some reminiscences prepared by Oglesby, recalling this last visit to the President. He stated: "Lincoln got to reading some humorous book—I think it was by 'John Phoenix'." So it appears that not only as a lawyer on the circuit in Illinois in 1855, but ten years later as President in 1865 he still found enjoyment in the book of humor. It may be that *Phoenixiana* was the last book from which Abraham Lincoln ever read.

More Stories Of Lincoln

"The fact is," once said Abraham Lincoln, "I don't like to hear cut-and-dried sermons. When I hear a man preach, I like to see him act as if he were fighting bees."

An Irishman once called at a post-office where Lincoln was postmaster. "I want my letter, Mr. Postmaster," the Irishman said. "What is the name?" asked Lincoln. "Sure and my name is on the letter," said the Irishman.

When a boy, Lincoln had an uncle who kept a mill. Noticing the mill grinding slowly one day, Lincoln said he could eat the meal faster than the mill could grind it. "For how long?" asked the miller. "Until I starved to death," Abe replied.

100-Year-Old Anecdotes Retold

Chi. Tribune - 2-20-1966

The Humorous Mr. Lincoln

BY KEITH W. JENNISON

Reviewed by Paul M. Angle

WHY DO THEY do it? Why does a capable, well established author suddenly turn to a new field, read a few books without discrimination, and risk his reputation on a trivial performance? And why does a first-rate publisher put into print a quickie that makes no contribution, and, in all probability, will not sell a sufficient number of copies to break even?

That Keith Jennison has only superficial knowledge of the Lincoln field is clear. He has Nancy Hanks reading aloud to her children, yet it has been well established that she could not read. Contrary to the author's assertion, Lincoln's family did accompany him when he went to

Paul M. Angle, former director of the Chicago Historical society, is an author, editor, and Civil war authority.

Washington as a congressman in 1847. Five members of his first cabinet were not his political rivals. Some had been Democrats, but by 1860 all had become Republicans.

Of the anecdotes that are the book's reason for being, a great many are sober. Most of those which purport to be humorous are stale. Why shouldn't they be? They have been appearing in print for almost a century.

THAT LINCOLN was a genuine humorist is incontrovertible, but no writer has succeeded in showing how funny he was. None can. William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, explained why: "In the role of story-teller I regard Mr. Lincoln as without an equal. His power of mimicry and his manner of recital were unique. His countenance and all his features seemed to take part in the performance. As he neared the pith or point of the story every vestige of seriousness disappeared from his face. His gray eyes sparkled; a smile seemed to gather up, curtain-like, the corners of his mouth; his frame quivered with suppressed excitement; and when the nub of the story—as he called it—came, no one's laugh was heartier than his."

Jennison quotes this passage. If he had taken its implications to heart, he might not have written this inconsequential book. [Crowell, 176 pages, \$4.95]

GAG BAG



Abraham Lincoln

RALPH G. NEWMAN, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book shop, historian, and chairman of the Illinois sesquicentennial commission, has been collecting Lincoln yarns and stories for many years. Here are some of them.

Lincoln, then a young lawyer, and a judge were bantering about horse trading. They agreed to swap, with \$25 to go to the shrewder dealer. At the appointed hour the judge arrived with the sorriest nag imaginable. Lincoln came along a few minutes later with a wooden saw horse on his shoulders. Amid laughter Lincoln set down his "horse" and commented, "Well, judge, this is the first time I ever got the worst of it in a horse trade."

A forbidding-looking man once aimed a revolver at Lincoln. The stranger said, "Years ago, I swore an oath that if I ever came across a man uglier than myself I'd shoot him on the spot." Relief relaxed Lincoln's face. "Shoot me," Lincoln said. "If I'm uglier than you I don't want to live."

When asked to give his opinion of Gen. Philip Sheridan, who had just taken command of cavalry under General Grant, Lincoln replied, "He is one of those long-armed fellows with short legs who can scratch his shins without having to stoop over."

Lincoln liked to joke about superstitions. "Look at this," he said one day, taking a potato from his pocket. Asked why he carried it, he replied: "For rheumatism. I haven't had a twinge of rheumatism since I've been carrying it." A bystander exclaimed, "Wonderful!" "Yes," said Lincoln. "And still more wonderful is the fact that it's retroactive, too. I never had a twinge before I began carrying it, either."

On a certain evening Lincoln left his stovepipe hat on a chair in the reception room of the secretary of war. On his return, a very fat woman arose from it to bow to the President. Lincoln returned the bow, then walking behind her, picked up the remains of his hat, and said, shaking his head sadly, "Madam, I could have told you my hat wouldn't fit you before you tried it on."

Lincoln once criticized a Greek history for its tediousness, and a diplomat took him to task about it. "The author of that history, Mr. President," he said, "is one of the most profound scholars of the age. No man of our generation has plunged more deeply into the sacred fount of learning."

"Yes, or come up drier," said Lincoln.

The President liked to tell a story about a southern Illinois preacher who asserted in a sermon that the Savior was the only perfect man who had ever been on earth. He added that there was no record in the Bible or anywhere else of a perfect woman, whereupon a beaten-down looking woman rose in the rear of the church and said: "I know of a perfect woman. I've heard of her every day for the last six years."

"And who was she?" asked the minister.

"My husband's first wife," was the reply.

WALTER WINCHELL

Ill. State Register Feb. 11-1967

Some Stories About A. Lincoln

Lincoln didn't want to go to the theatre on that fatal night. The play was "Our American Cousin" and he had seen it before. Besides, he was tired and wanted to go to bed early . . . But Mrs. Lincoln insisted she wanted to see the show—and he gave in.

When they were leaving for the theatre he jokingly said: "I'll go, Mary, but if I don't go down in history as the martyr President, I miss my guess."

When a reporter informed Lincoln he was assigned to cover a Democratic convention the President asked him to send several letters about the event. The newspaperman asked what points he should emphasize.

"I want the interesting stories," said Mr. Lincoln. "The stories you would talk about—but wouldn't print."

When he was running for Congress, Lincoln asked a constituent if he would vote for him. He was told: "I admire your head, Mr. Lincoln, but damn your heart."

"Mr. Voter," Lincoln countered, "I admire your candor, but damn your manners."

Lincoln was a devout man. He once explained his faith in religion this way: "When I gaze at the stars I feel that I am looking at the face of God. I can see how it might be possible for a man to look upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God."

He enjoyed preachers who went in for histrionics during their sermons. He said: "I don't like to hear cut-and-dried sermons. When I hear a man preach I like to see him act as if he were fighting bees."

Lincoln loathed snobs. When he came across one of them bragging about his ancestors being born in America he was reminded of a patriotic foreign-born American who said: "I wanted to be born in America — but my mother wouldn't let me!"

When Lincoln was running for Congress his opponent was a preacher named Peter Cartwright . . . Lincoln went to watch him deliver a sermon. He concluded his preaching with: "All those who want to get to Heaven will rise" . . . Everybody stood up except Lincoln. Cartwright asked why he had remained in his seat.

"Because," was the reply, "I'm going to Congress."

When Lincoln was practicing law he joined a group of attorneys near a fireplace in a tavern. He warmed his hands over the fire and commented: "It is a very cold night. Colder than hell."

Whereupon one of the lawyers asked: "You've been there?"

"Yes," he snapped, "and the funny thing is that it's much like it is here — all lawyers are nearest the fire."

Lincoln picture, 7¼x5½ (1906). Translation from M990.

XII. (Abraham Lincoln) Finnish. O1379, M3861

Wrappers 8¼x5¼, 354p. Translated from M3849.

ETIQUETTE IN THE WHITE HOUSE

The John G. Nicolay collection of manuscripts in the Library-Museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation has among its many interesting documents a "memorandum from the State Department laying down rules of etiquette" for the Lincoln Administration.

The cardinal rule, because it comes first, is to the effect that the President must "never say 'sir' in addressing a titled foreigner."

Nicolay's rather rough and incomplete notes, based on the State Department's memorandum, follow:

Calls

The Private Secretary represents (the President) in acknowledging social courtesies by return and other calls.

Official Calls

On Senate, House, Sup. Court & etc.

On Diplomatic Corps

Style of card

No. of Cards left

One card for each member of family in Society.

Mark no card at private house except to designate a stranger or one not member of the family.

Folded

Turn over corner when left in person.

Send only to hotels.

Receptions

Ordinarily when given

Beginning first Tuesday in January and alternating with Secretary of State to end of March.

Special

As military

Official reception on New Years

11 to 11½ the Diplomatic Corps

11½ to 12 Judges of Supreme Court

11¼ to officers of Army and Navy

from 12 to 2 general reception

Diplomatic

At the Diplomatic reception the cabinet & their families form part of President's family

Official

No other regular reception for Diplomatic Corps

At informal evening calls of Diplomats it is well for the President to go down.

At Saturday receptions the President ought to go down.

Parties

Parties if given must be entirely informal or accidental.

Calls

As the President accepts no invitations to dine or to parties (only in exceptional cases) he is at liberty to make social visits or calls when and where he pleases.

Dinners

Cabinet

Diplomatic

Senatorial

Representative

Supreme Court

Heads of Bureaus ought to be invited occasionally.

Citizens of Washington ought to be invited now and then.

May be given during the spring when the crowds are away.

Visiting strangers ought to be invited — May be mixed in at official dinners.

Military and Naval

Sometimes given invitations.

When Issued

For dinner, invitations should be issued one week before.

See to getting answer

Form of Answer required

As soon as possible

Additions

May send additional invitations up to within two

days of dinner & verbally after.

How Addressed

Cards should be addressed to the lady of the house when there is one

[The hour for state dinners was 7]

Dress for gentlemen

Coat

Black Dress

Blue Dress bright buttons

(Never wear frocks)

Pants

Black — white in Summer

Vest

Black

Shirt

.....

Gloves

White or straw kids

Boots

Boots or shoes

Cravat

White

New Years Receptions

Many details

Note: The Speaker & Vice President are not invited formally but admitted in case of their own accord see fit to come

THE WIT AND WISDOM OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Nobody appreciated the wisdom of laughter more fully than Abraham Lincoln. His peculiar genius for utilizing the funny story to illustrate a point, or to sway others to his way of thinking, is widely recognized. It would be expected, therefore, that in a library such as we have at the Lincoln National Life Foundation, which contains over ten thousand books and pamphlets dealing with the life of Abraham Lincoln, there would be a considerable number devoted to his wit and his wisdom. Each year we would normally expect to add a few more items in this category, and this would certainly astonish no one. What is surprising is that within a period of nineteen months we have added to our collection four publications with identical titles: *The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln*. These range in size from a miniature brochure measuring 3¼ by 2½ inches and containing 60 pages, to an 8¼ by 5½ inch book of 265 pages.

The book, by H. Jack Lang, was first published in 1941, with additional printings in 1942, 1943, 1944, 1946 and 1965. The brochures are compiled by Hallmark Cards, Inc., Pyramid Books and the Fleming H. Revell Company.

A fifth publication recently added to our library bears the title *Abraham Lincoln, Wisdom & Wit*. This brochure of 61 pages is compiled by Louise Bachelder. Like those mentioned above, it is comprised of excerpts from Lincoln's speeches, letters and other writings.

Still another publication with similar title, *Abraham Lincoln — A Digest of the Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln* by King V. Hostick was released in 1958 and added to our library in 1962.

Ruth Higgins

NOTICE

Lincoln Lore Index 1-1500

About November 1, 1967 there will be available for sale a *Lincoln Lore Index* extending from the first copy issued April 15, 1929 to the fifteen hundredth copy issued in February, 1963. The index will be a 56 page publication in offset printing of green ink and will measure 11"x8½", the identical measurements of *Lincoln Lore*. The index will be in three divisions; namely, titles, subjects and persons.

The price of the index will be \$2.00. All orders will be handled through the Lincoln National Life Foundation.

pany the supposedly accredited messengers to Lincoln, but he discovered that they were without the proper credentials.

Lincoln next wrote a "To Whom It May Concern" statement dated July 18, 1864. It follows:

*Executive Mansion
Washington, July 18, 1864*

To Whom it may concern:

Any proposition which embraces the restoration of peace, the integrity of the whole Union, and the abandonment of slavery, and which comes by and with an authority that can control the armies now at war against the United States will be received and considered by the Executive government of the United States, and will be met by liberal terms on other substantial and collateral points; and the bearer, or bearers thereof shall have safe-conduct both ways.

Abraham Lincoln

This statement was carried by John Hay, who arrived at Niagara Falls on the 20th of July, but Greeley's peace efforts were a fiasco. The *New York Tribune* editor had been deceived, and he took his defeat in his little game of diplomacy in a bad spirit.

The President, however, remained consistent in his desire to meet "any persons, anywhere" or to put it differently, "at any time" to discuss conditions that would lead to peace.

"I have learned to face threats on my life philosophically and have prepared myself for anything that might come."

M. L. K.

An account of Lincoln's dream, which may have been a premonition of his approaching death, was first recorded by Ward Hill Lamon in his *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln 1847-1865*, which book was edited by Dorothy Lamon Teillard (his daughter) in 1895, and published by

A. C. McClurg and Company. According to the author, this dream was related by Lincoln "only a few days before his assassination." Lamon stated that he was present with Mrs. Lincoln when the President revealed the following secret of his sub-conscious mind:

About ten days ago, I retired very late. I had been up waiting for important dispatches from the front. I could not have been long in bed when I fell into a slumber, for I was weary. I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. I went from room to room; no living person was in sight, but the same mournful sounds of distress met me as I passed along. It was light in all the rooms; every object was familiar to me; but where were all the people who were grieving as if their hearts would break? I was puzzled and alarmed. What could be the meaning of all this? Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking, I kept on until I arrived at the East Room, which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully. "Who is dead in the White House?" I demanded of one of the soldiers. "The President," was his answer; "he was killed by an assassin!"

Does history really repeat itself? While these episodes in history are not carbon copies of the political, diplomatic and military maneuvers of 1968, along with the chaos and assassination that marks our troubled times, there are certain overtones which might lead one to believe that history sometimes appears to repeat itself.

Joe Miller's Jests

A favorite yarn that is often told to illustrate Abraham Lincoln's brand of humor concerns the man with a pitchfork and a farmer's dog. According to Frederick Trevor Hill, who wrote *Lincoln The Lawyer*, the occasion when the Illinois attorney told this story was while he was defending a case of assault and battery. It had been proved that the plaintiff had been the aggressor, but the opposing counsel argued that "the defendant might have protected himself without inflicting injuries on his assailant."

With this argument in mind Lincoln said, "That reminds me of a man who was attacked by a farmer's dog, which he killed with a pitchfork. 'What made you kill my dog?' demanded the farmer. 'What made him try to bite me?' retorted the offender. 'But why didn't you go at him with the other end of your pitchfork?' persisted the farmer. 'Well, why didn't he come at me with his other end?' was the retort."

Where did Lincoln get this story which must have proved to be so valuable to him in his assault and battery case? From *Joe Miller's Jests* which was first published in 1739. Henry C. Whitney, in his book *Life on The Circuit with Lincoln*, stated that "He (Lincoln) really liked Joke books, and among others which I know to have been favorites were 'Recollections of A. Ward, Showman,' 'Flush Times in Alabama,' Petroleum V. Nasby's letters, and Joe Miller's Joke book. He would read them aloud to whomsoever he could get to listen to him."

The Joe Miller version of the yarn follows: "A Dog coming open-mouth'd at a Serjeant upon a March, he run

he had run at me with his Tail."

We do not know what edition of *Joe Miller's Jests* Lincoln read. The first and subsequent early editions are real collectors' items. A description of the first edition follows: "(Mottley, John). Joe Miller's Jests; or the Wit's Vade-Mecum: being a collection of the most brilliant jests, the politest repartees, the most elegant bons mots, and most pleasant short stories in the English language; first transcribed from the mouth of the facetious gentleman whose name they bear, and now set forth and published by his lamented friend and former companion, Elijah Jenkins, Esq. 8 vo, London: Printed and sold by T. Read, 1739." Of the first edition very few perfect copies are known. The book sells today in fair condition from \$750 upward."

For information gathered by Hal-ket & Laing we must conclude that John Mottley was the compiler. "In the list of English dramatic writers appended to Whincop's Scanderbeg, published in 1747, it is stated under Mottley's name, that 'the book that bears the title of Joe Miller's jests was a collection made by him from other books, and a great part of it supplied by his memory from original stories recollected in his former conversations.' Joe Miller himself was a comic actor, who made his first appearance at Drury Lane Theatre on the 30th April, 1715; in 'The constant couple'; he died on the 16 of August 1738."

The Lincoln Foundation's copy is a facsimile of the rare first edition of 1739 which was published in London about 1870.

Joe Miller's JESTS OR, THE W I T S VADE-MECUM. BEING

A Collection of the most BRILLIANT JESTS; the politest REPARTES; the most Elegant BONs MOTs, and most pleasant short Stories in the English Language.

First carefully collected in the Company, and many of them transcribed from the Mouth of the facetious GENTLEMAN, whose Name they bear; and now set forth and published by his lamentable Friend and former Companion, *Elijah Jenkins, Esq.*

Most Humbly INSCRIBED

To these CHOICE-SPIRITS of the AGE,

Captain BODENS, Mr. ALEXANDER POPE, Mr. Professor LACY, Mr. Orator HENLEY, and JOE BAKER, the Kettle-Drummer.

L O N D O N :

Printed and Sold by T. READ, in Doggall-Court, White-Friars, Fleet-Street, MCCCXXXIX.

the Spear of his Halbert into his Throat and kill'd him: The Owner coming out rav'd extremely that his Dog was kill'd, and ask'd the Serjeant, *Why, he could not as well have struck at him with the blunt End of his Halbert? So I would, says he, if*

Feb. 12, 1973



joe creason

A rare sense of humor helped sustain Lincoln

THOSE WHO scoff at the therapeutic benefits of laughter should study the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president who was born 164 years ago in a crude log cabin in Kentucky.

For Lincoln's less than five years in office came during the Civil War, the tragic time when the Union he had vowed to preserve seemed certain to crumble. And, perhaps more than any man ever to occupy the awesome position, he relied on humor to break the tension of his office and give him strength to carry on in the face of mountainous problems.

"If I were unable to laugh," he said once, "I think I should die."

In keeping with that philosophy, he constantly used earthy, homey, humorous stories as an instrument to underscore, to emphasize and to point up. As at a Cabinet meeting in 1863, the darkest war year, when things were especially grim. An entire army hadn't been heard from in days and was feared lost in Tennessee. While the Cabinet met, word came from the army stating it was out of rations, low on

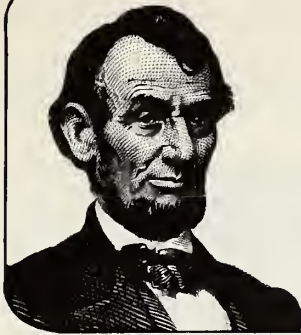
ammunition and the enemy was closing in.

"That's good," Lincoln sighed. "In a situation like this, I'm like the old woman in Kentucky who had so many children she couldn't keep up with them. Every time she would hear one cry, she'd say, 'Well, there's one of my children who isn't dead yet!'"

Shortly after being re-elected for a second term, he was asked what it was like to be president.

"I feel like the poor man who had been tarred and feathered and was being ridden out of town on a rail," he replied. "The man turned to his tormentors and said, 'Really now, if it wasn't for the honor of the occasion, I'd just as soon you hadn't done this!'"

Yes, indeed. Maybe there's a lesson for today in the simple humor a great American turned to in his time of need.



Lincoln Lore

February, 1980

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.
Mary Jane Hubler, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1704

THE LAST BOOK LINCOLN READ

J.G. Randall said of Lincoln that the "continual interweaving of good fun in his writings and speeches shows that humor was no mere technique, but a habit of his mind." His fondness for humorous writers was lifelong. All students of Lincoln's tastes in reading note his affection for such humorists as Orpheus C. Kerr (a pun on "office seeker" and the pseudonym of Robert H. Newell). Petroleum V. Nasby (the pseudonym of David Ross Locke) was another favorite. The day Lincoln first presented the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet, he began the meeting by reading "High Handed Outrage in Utica," a humorous piece by Artemus Ward (the pseudonym of Charles Farrar Browne). Lincoln's penchant for reading aloud from comical books apparently persisted to his dying day, when he regaled old friends with anecdotes from *Phoenixiana*; or, *Sketches and Burlesques*.

John Phoenix was the pseudonym of George Horatio Derby. Born in Dedham, Massachusetts, in 1823, Derby graduated from West Point in 1846. He served with distinction in the Mexican War and later led several exploring expeditions in the West, mostly in California. A wit and a notorious practical joker, he first gained literary distinction in California in 1853, when he was put in temporary charge of the *San Diego Herald*, a Democratic newspaper. Derby was a Whig in politics, one of a great tradition of Whig humorists, and he quickly turned the newspaper on its head politically. California howled with laughter. In 1856 he published *Phoenixiana*, a collection of humorous sketches which became immediately popular.

Naturally, Lincoln was attracted to the Whig humorist. In his debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Freeport on August 27, 1858, Lincoln charged his opponent with inconsistency on the question of the power of states to exclude slavery from their limits. Douglas, Lincoln insisted, had once charged that the Democratic administration of James Buchanan was conspiring "to rob the States of their power to exclude slavery from their limits." Douglas withdrew the charge when Robert Toombs of Georgia stated that only one man in the Union favored such a move.

It reminds me of the story [Lincoln continued] that John Phoenix, the California railroad surveyor, tells. He says they started out from the Plaza to the Mission of Dolores. They had two ways of determining distances. One was by a chain and pins taken over the ground. The other was by a "go-it-ometer" — an invention of his own — a three-legged instrument, with which he computed a series of triangles between the points. At night he turned to the chain-man to ascertain what distance they had come, and found that by some mistake he had merely dragged the chain over the ground without keeping any record. By the "go-it-ometer" he found he had made ten miles. Being skeptical about this, he asked a drayman who was passing how far it was to the plaza. The drayman replied it was just half a mile, and the surveyor put it down in his book — just as Judge Douglas says, after he had made his calculations and computations, he took Toombs' statement.

The reporters covering the speech noted that "Great laughter" followed.

The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum recently acquired a copy of *Phoenixiana*, notable because it belonged to David Davis, Lincoln's friend and Judge for the Eighth Judicial Circuit. Davis wrote his name and the date, "March 28th . . . 1856," in pencil on the back of the frontispiece. The Sangamon County Circuit Court was then in session in Springfield, and Lincoln argued before the Court that day. One cannot help speculating that Judge Davis very likely showed the book to his friend.

If Lincoln owned a copy of *Phoenixiana* himself, its present location is unknown. It seems likely that he did, however. The description of Lincoln's last day by Katherine Helm, Mary Todd Lincoln's niece, mentions the book. After their carriage ride in the late afternoon, President and Mrs. Lincoln separated. The President entered the White House with Richard J. Oglesby, the Governor of Illinois, and some other political friends. According to Miss Helm, Governor Oglesby later recalled:

Lincoln got to reading



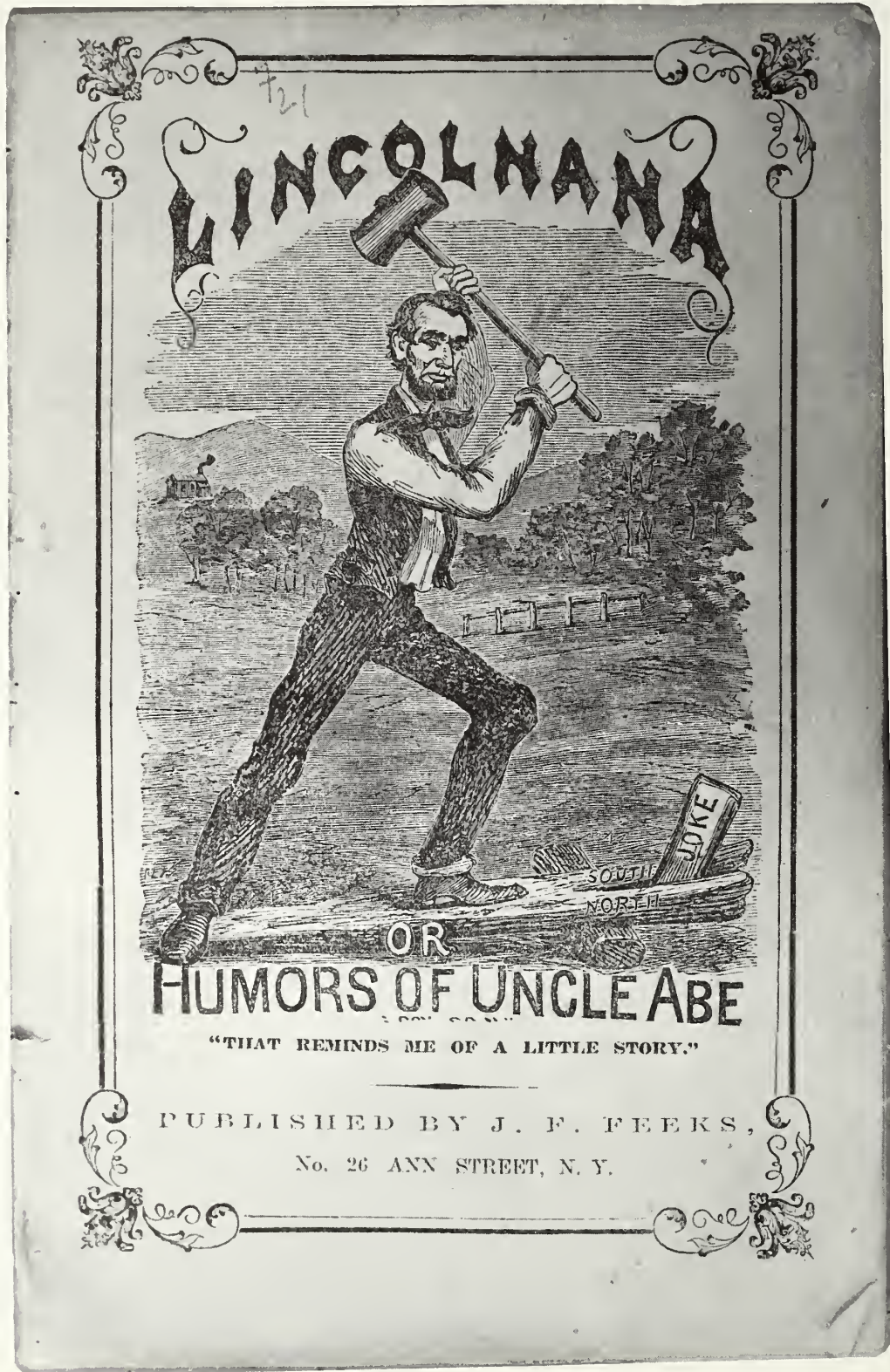
Yours respectfully
John P. Squibb

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. The frontispiece of *Phoenixiana*, shown above, has this note printed under it: "This autograph may be relied on as authentic, as it was written by one of Mr. Squibb's most intimate friends."

some humorous book — I think it was by "John Phoenix." They kept sending for him to come to dinner. He promised each time to go, but would continue reading the book. Finally he got a sort of peremptory order that he must come

to dinner at once. It was explained to me by the old man at the door that they were going to have dinner and then go to the theater.



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. *Lincolnana* was one of several cheap paperbacks published during the Civil War which capitalized on the President's reputation for enjoying humor. Though this trait endears Lincoln to us today, it was not universally admired in his own day. Note that the cover of this book shows him splitting the Union with a joke. Lincoln was often pictured as a vulgar jokester, too small for the great office he occupied.

Political insult ain't what it used to be



Whatever happened to the fine old art of political insult? Maybe it's because they've been squeezed through too many TV tubes, but don't modern politicians seem a bit bland?

With no polls, PR wizards or slick video ads to rely on, candidates used to go into combat armed with razor wits and luxurious vocabularies. Maledictions sizzled through the air like rockets. And a sharpened slur could be lethal.

For instance: the eloquent John Randolph, of Virginia, was not fond of his fellow Congressman, Henry Clay, of Kentucky. One day, brimming with bile, Randolph shot off this description of Clay: "This being, so brilliant yet so corrupt, which, like a rotten mackerel by moonlight, shined and stunk."

Slapped with a sentence like that, a man might forever smell faintly of fish. That sort of invective led one foreign observer of our political style to note that Americans were the only people he knew to pass from barbarism to decadence without experiencing civilization.

Disgusted with a campaigner who was trampling all over the facts, a reporter told fellow newsman Heywood Broun, "He's murdering the truth!" "Don't worry," Broun replied. "He'll never get close enough to do it any harm." New York attorney Roscoe Conkling, asked to campaign for Presidential candidate James G. Blaine, replied, "I do not engage in criminal practice."

It was Theodore Roosevelt who inspired one of the neatest political barbs. Teddy had just left on a much-publicized lion-hunting safari in Africa when the following notice appeared on a wall at

the New York Stock Exchange. "Wall Street expects every lion to do his duty."

Politicians weren't the only ones with sharp tongues. Hecklers, too, knew the potency of a booby-trapped sentence, as William Jennings Bryan discovered. During a political speech he unleashed his famous oratorical ability, crying, "I wish I had the wings of a bird to fly to every village and hamlet in America to tell the people about this silver question." Cried a voice from the audience, "You'd be shot for a goose before you've flown a mile."

Of course, politicians developed excellent defenses against such snipers. One crack shot, when it came to gunning down hecklers, was Al Smith. During one of his campaigns for governor of New York, just as he began an address, a voice from the crowd bawled out: "Tell us all you know, Al—it won't take long." "I'll tell 'em all we *both* know," snapped Smith. "It won't take any longer."

Yesterday's politicians reserved their highest caliber insults for each other. When Bryan was elected to Congress in 1891, he was dubbed the "Boy Orator of the Platte." Senator Joseph Foraker, of Ohio, announced that like the Platte River, in Bryan's home state of Nebraska, Bryan was "only six inches deep but six miles wide at the mouth."

During the Presidential campaign of 1940, Harold Ickes, the sharp-tongued Secretary of the Interior, called Republican candidate Wendell Willkie "a simple barefoot Wall Street lawyer." And when the youthful Thomas E. Dewey announced in 1944 that he was entering the Presidential race on the Republican ticket, Ickes noted that "Mr. Dewey has tossed his diapers into the ring."

Calvin Coolidge had an even drier New England wit. Once eager to impress the President, a speaker at a party function went on and on and on. "How did you like my speech, Mr. President?" he asked Coolidge later. "Not bad," said Cal, "but you missed a nice opportunity." "What was that?" asked the man. "The opportunity to sit down about twenty minutes earlier," Coolidge said.

But Coolidge's taciturnity made him the butt of many barbed comments himself. Clarence Darrow called him "the greatest man who ever came out of Plymouth Corner, Vermont." And when Dorothy Parker was told that Calvin Coolidge was dead, she said: "How can they tell?"

Lincoln, considered our greatest President, was also one of our great political wits. Usually his humor took the form of kindly parables, but he could be as sharp as an Illinois ax when provoked.

Of a lawyer he didn't like, Lincoln once said, "He can compress the most words into the smallest ideas better than any man I ever met." And, during the early days of the Civil War, General McClellan's indecision exasperated Lincoln so much that he wrote a note: "My dear McClellan: If you do not want to use the Army I should like to borrow it. . . ."

Later, Lincoln sent General Hooker to take over the Army; Hooker rushed headlong into action, sending his dispatches from "Headquarters in the saddle." Grinning to an aide, Lincoln said: "The trouble with Hooker is that he's got his headquarters where his hindquarters ought to be."

What 1980 politician can match that?

Chief Joker

Lincoln used humor to amuse, disarm during public career

By ELOISE K. SHICK
Reprinted from Rural Kentuckian

On a cold February morning in 1809, Abraham Lincoln entered this world-looking "like a red cherry pulp squeezed dry." Trouble was, he often said of himself, his looks didn't improve as he grew.

History documents only one likeness of Lincoln smiling. Yet he was far from a brooding, melancholy figure. In fact, he was often accused by his contemporaries of unseemly levity in office. He once told a friend that he lived by his humor—and would have died without it.

Even as a child, Lincoln was quick to quip. One day, young Abe was given a sack of grain to deliver to a miller who had a reputation for laziness. As he watched the man slowly grind the grain, Lincoln commented:

"You know I'll bet I could eat that grain as fast as you're grinding it."

"And just how long do you think you could keep it up?" asked the miller.

"Oh," said the future president, "until I starved to death, I guess."

Lincoln made a name for himself as a lawyer; what made him famous throughout the judicial circuit was not so much his skill in the courtroom as his jokes and stories.

On one occasion, he was questioning a hostile witness named John Cass. When he finally had enough, Lincoln smiled disarmingly and asked Cass, "Anybody ever call you Jack?"

Judge David Davis, before whom he tried many cases, was one of Lincoln's greatest fans.

"His presence on the circuit was watched for," Davis said, "and never failed to produce joy and hilarity."

One day the judge remarked about the

extreme length of a bill drawn up by a rather indolent lawyer.

"Astonishing, ain't it?" said the judge.

"Yes, it is," said Lincoln. "Reminds me of the lazy preacher that used to write long sermons. He got to writin' and was too lazy to stop."

Of another boastful lawyer, Lincoln said, "He can compress the most words into the smallest ideas of any man I ever met."

Ward Lamon, Lincoln's friend and fellow attorney, ripped his pants in a scuffle outside the Bloomington, Ill., courthouse one day. Before he had time to change, he was called into court. Noting Ward's obvious misfortune, his colleagues passed a paper soliciting funds for a new pair of pants. When the paper arrived in Lincoln's lap, he wrote, "I can contribute nothing to the end in view."

Politics gave Lincoln an even greater arena for his humor. During his congressional race, he attended a meeting for his opponent, evangelist Peter Cartwright.

"All who desire to lead a good life," Cartwright called into the audience, "and send a good man to Congress and go to heaven will please stand."

Everyone rose but Lincoln.

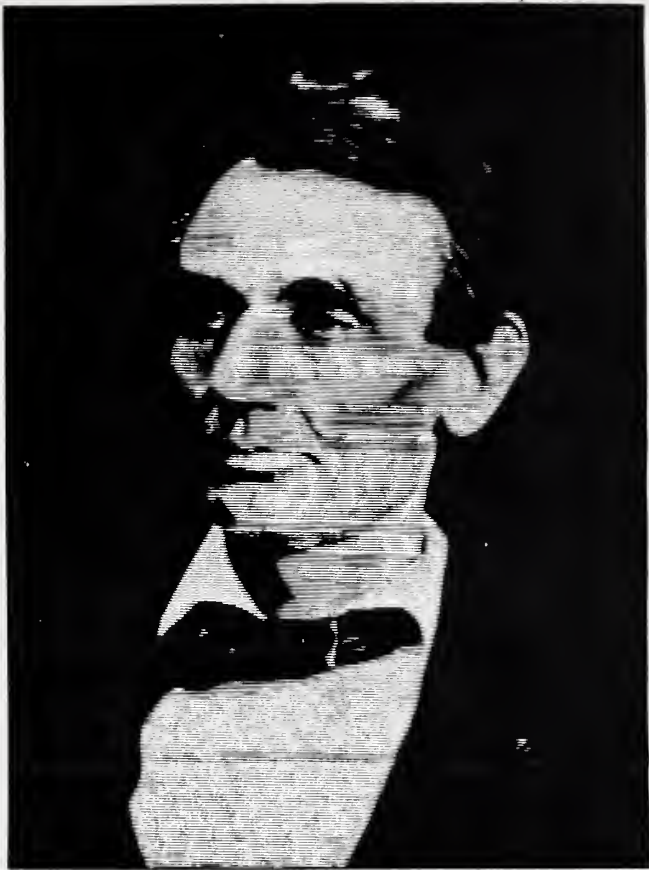
"And now all those will stand who shun the good life, who wish to see a sinful, unprincipled man in Congress and who must surely go to hell."

All eyes were on Lincoln, who remained seated.

"Well, Mr. Lincoln," said Cartwright, "you don't want to go to heaven and you don't want to go to hell. Where are you going?"

Lincoln got up slowly, reached for his tall hat and said, "I'm going to Congress" and promptly left the meeting.

During the Lincoln-Douglas debates



Library of Congress

President Abraham Lincoln was renowned for his wit during his presidency and throughout his earlier career as a lawyer.

of 1858, his inexhaustible humor won him many points. When Douglas called Lincoln "a two-faced man" during one round, Lincoln replied, "I leave it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I would wear this one?"

After his election to the Presidency, Lincoln attended many receptions where watchful ushers kept the public at bay. One guest, disappointed at not having shaken Lincoln's hand, waved his hat and blurted out, "Mr. President, I'm from up in York State where we believe that God Almighty and Abraham Lincoln are going to save this country."

Lincoln smiled and said, "My friend, you're about half right."

Lincoln found relief from the bitter and bloody disasters of the Civil War in laughter. He'd stalk through the White House at night, his gaunt figure clad in a flapping flannel nightgown, seeking someone still awake to share a funny story he'd just read. His favorite involved two Quaker ladies discussing the war:

"I think Jefferson Davis will succeed," said the first, "because Jef-

feron is a praying man."

"And so is Abraham a praying man," said the other.

"Yes, but the Lord will think Abraham is joking."

London's *Saturday Review* called Lincoln "not the Chief Joker of the land."

When asked how large the Confederate Army was, Lincoln said, "About 1,200,000 men."

He claimed he arrived at such a large figure because the Union had 400,000 men and "whenever one of our generals is licked, he says that he was outnumbered three or four to one."

Lincoln's humor was deeply rooted in a knowledge of human nature. When Gen. George B. McClellan hesitated from storming Richmond, Lincoln sent him a note:

"My dear McClellan: If you don't want to use the Army, I should like to borrow it for awhile."

And in the midst of battle, Gen. "Fighting Joe" Hooker sent the President the message, "Headquarters in the saddle," prompting Lincoln to tell his Cabinet, "The trouble with Hooker is that he has his headquarters where his hindquarters ought to be."

CARTOONISTS & COMMENTATORS, POLITICIANS & PUBLISHERS, SOUTHERNERS & NORTHERNERS— EVERYONE SEEMED TO FEEL FREE TO LAMPOON LINCOLN.

HOW THE PRESIDENT RESPONDED REVEALED HIS GREATNESS

by harold holzer

IT NOW SEEMS A DISTANT MEMORY, but in October 1998 a situation comedy set in the Civil War White House premiered on national television and promptly ignited a firestorm of outrage. *The Secret Life of Desmond Pfeiffer* offended just about everyone: critics, for what one called “jaw dropping” witlessness; African Americans, for making a joke of slavery; feminists, for portraying Hillary Clinton as a sexual predator; and supporters of her husband, for transparently satirizing his problems with affairs, apologies, and grand juries.

Most of all—before it died a quiet death, the victim of anemic ratings—*Desmond Pfeiffer* offended admirers of Abraham Lincoln. The show reduced the Great Emancipator of legend to an inept, insensitive, sex-starved dolt. One scene actually depicted Lincoln fantasizing lasciviously about the brawny young male soldiers in the Union army.

The irreverence was enough to inspire an

attendee at a Lincoln Family symposium at Robert Todd Lincoln’s Hildene estate in Manchester, Vermont, to circulate an irate petition demanding the show’s cancellation. “The nature of this will dishonor the name and character of the man who has been rightly acclaimed our greatest national leader,” the petition argued. “We, the undersigned are highly indignant that television wishes to degrade Lincoln in any way.” Irreverently portraying the 16th president, it maintained, constituted the desecration of an American saint, an insult to history, and a threat to national memory.

But was it? Forgotten by these and other angry viewers was a contrary historical truth: Abraham Lincoln had been dragged through the mud before, and often. He was mercilessly lampooned, viciously libeled, and relentlessly satirized in his own time—and his reputation not only survived but flourished. In fact, his stoic and good-natured response in the face of such stabs from

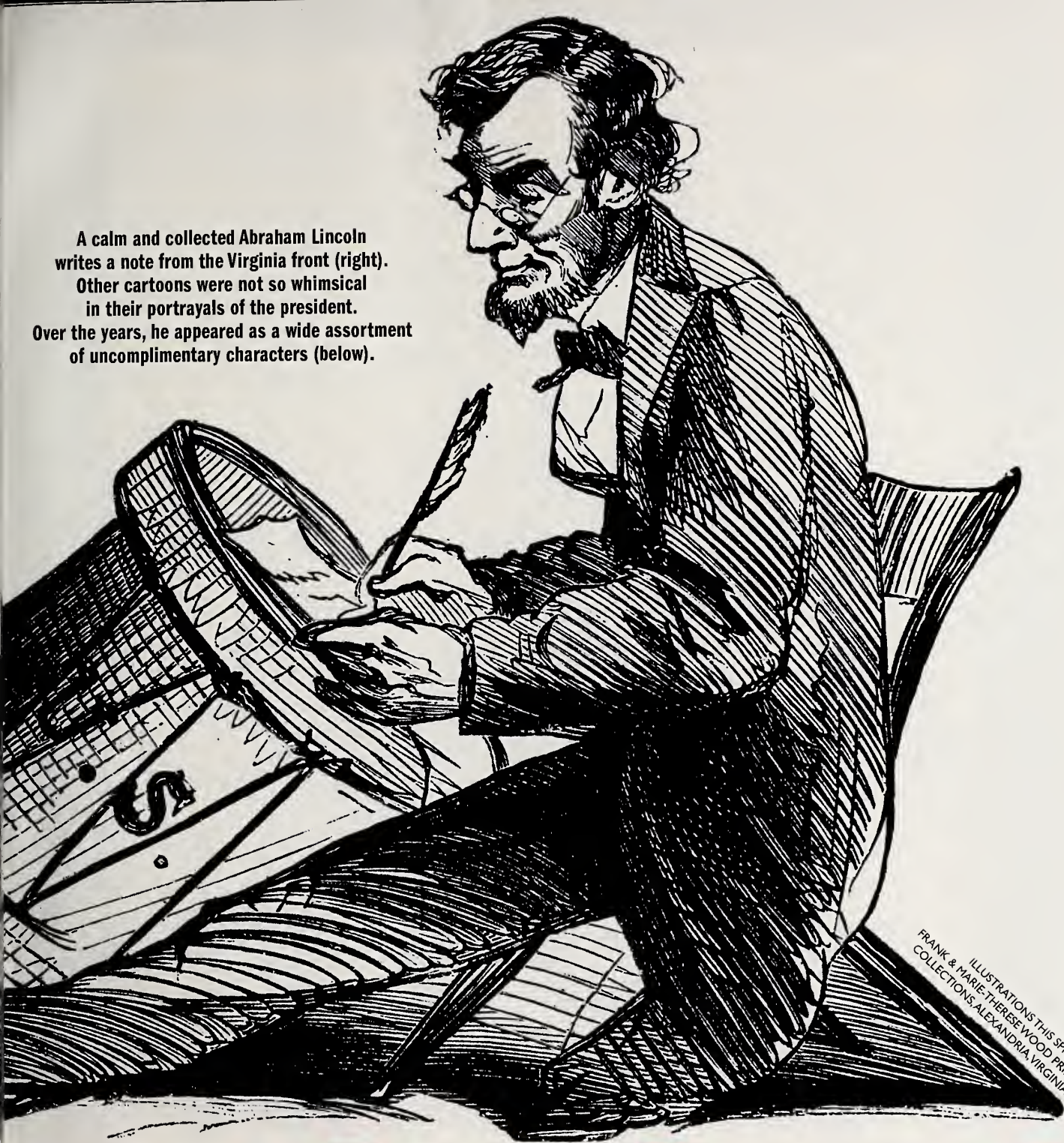


Lincoln take

A calm and collected Abraham Lincoln writes a note from the Virginia front (right).

Other cartoons were not so whimsical in their portrayals of the president.

Over the years, he appeared as a wide assortment of uncomplimentary characters (below).



es the heat



the stiletto of malicious verbal and visual abuse made him seem nobler at the time, and greater in retrospect.

The national humor mill of the era made Lincoln its favorite grist. American humorists portrayed the Civil War, to paraphrase Lincoln, "with malice toward *one*." And that *one* was Lincoln himself. His ungainly form, homely face, and awkward Western manner—not to mention his controversial policies—formed a combustible mixture that inflamed professional and political humorists.

coln emerged as a national figure, following his unexpected nomination to the presidency in May 1860. Engravers and lithographers rushed to publish flattering portraits introducing the reputedly ugly candidate to a wary public. But as much as the Republicans sought to make virtues of Lincoln's humble origins and miraculous rise, Democrats encouraged lampoons that mocked those very qualities. Often the same publishers who met the consumer demand for Lincoln portraits also made a lot of money churning out caricature sheets.

the quintessential 1860 campaign cartoon when they portrayed *The Rail Candidate* astride a log rail labeled "Republican National Platform," being carried to the White House by supporters. "It is true I have Split Rails," the uncomfortable nominee declares, "but I begin to feel as if *this* Rail would split me, it's the hardest stick I ever straddled." Coarser variations on the theme depicted him erecting log-rail camouflage to conceal "niggers in the woodpile"—metaphorically minimizing attention on the stormy slavery issue by focusing vot-



The wooden rail and the Scotch cap were staples of Lincoln cartoons. The rail (above) was a reference to the worn-out story of his heroic rise from lowly splitter of logs to president of a nation. The Scotch cap first appeared in a cartoon by pro-Confederate artist Adalbert Volck making fun of Lincoln for wearing a disguise during his 1861 move to Washington, D.C. (opposite).

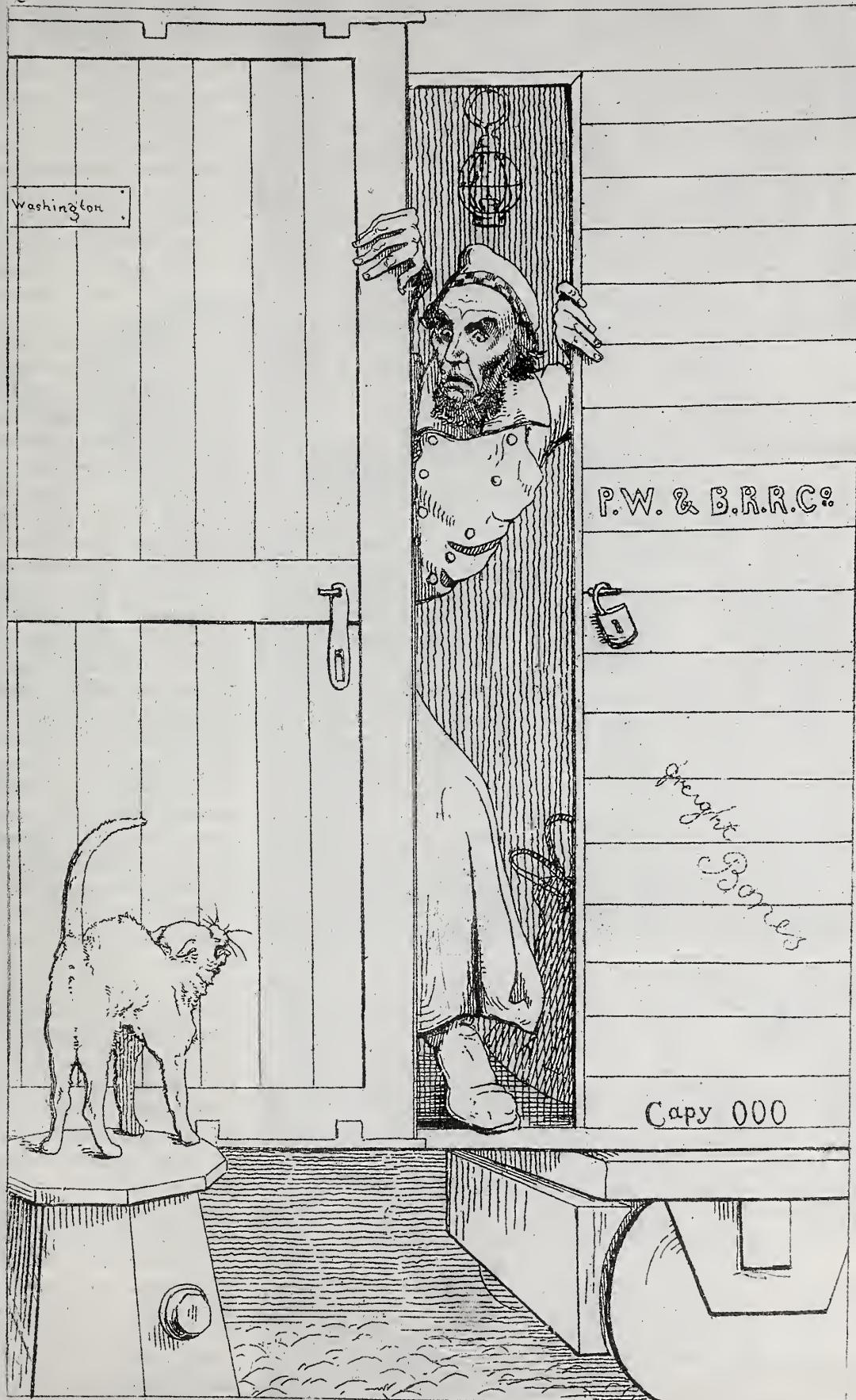
This frequent butt of ridicule was comically maligned in the press, in books, and in cartoons published in the North as well as the South, in Europe as well as America. *Desmond Pfeiffer* was no exception; it was a return to the rule.

The mockery began as soon as Lin-

Such cartoons usually depicted Lincoln as a country bumpkin with a wild thatch of uncombed hair, clad in ill-fitting pantaloons and open-necked shirts, and wielding a log rail to ward off serious inquiries into his supposedly dangerous views on racial equality. Currier & Ives of New York may have crafted

ers instead on his inspiring ascent from a log cabin to the White House.

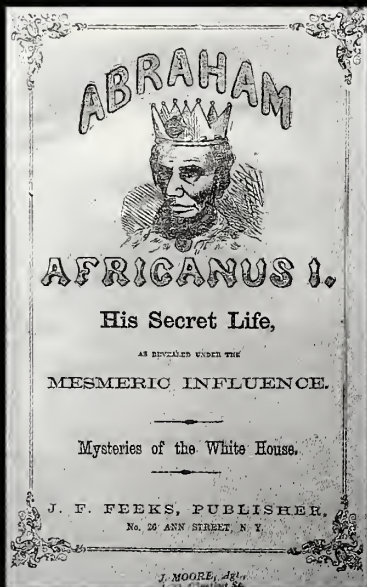
Lincoln had only himself to blame for inspiring the next wave of ridicule early the next year en route to his inauguration in Washington. By donning what security advisor Allen Pinkerton described as "a soft low-crowned hat"





COLUMBIA DEMANDS HER CHILDREN!

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THE FRANK & VIRGINIA WILLIAMS COLLECTION

Above: Representing the war-weary nation, Columbia demands Union troops be returned home. Left: The characterization of Lincoln as African king attacked both his sympathy for black people and his perceived tyrannical tendencies. Below: Portraying Hamlet in this mock scene from Shakespeare's play, Major General George McClellan, who ran against Lincoln in the 1864 presidential election, remarks dryly that his once-witty rival is making jokes no more.



"I KNEW HIM, DORATIO: A FELLOW OF INFINITE Jest. . . . WHERE RE YOUR GIBES NOW?—Hamlet, Act IV, Scene 1.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

and a "bob-tailed overcoat" to avoid recognition in hostile Baltimore while changing trains in Baltimore, Lincoln invited charges that he was a coward. Exaggerating his disguise into "a Scotch plaid Cap and a very long military Cloak," cartoonists at *Harper's Weekly* issued a hilarious pictorial parody under the headline, "The Flight of Abraham." One panel showed him quaking in fear so violently that Henry Seward, incoming secretary of state, explains to President James Buchanan that his successor is suffering "only a little attack of ague." Assailing the sectional hostility that inspired the drastic evasive tactic in Baltimore, the pro-Republican New York *Tribune* was nonetheless forced to admit: "It is the only instance recorded in our history in which the recognized head of a nation...has been compelled, for fear of his life, to enter the capital in disguise." More blunt was the denunciation by the *Baltimore Sun*:

Had we any respect for Mr. Lincoln, official or personal, as a man, or as President elect of the United States...the final escapade by which he reached the capital would have utterly demolished it.... He might have entered Willard's Hotel with a "head spring" and a "summersault," and the clown's merry greeting to Gen. Scott, "Here we are!" and we should care nothing about it, personally. We do not believe the Presidency can ever be more degraded by any of his successors than it has by him, even before his inauguration.

A wave of anti-Lincoln pictorial lampoons now flooded the country—progressively exaggerating his Baltimore disguise until one example showed him as a bare-kneed Scotsman in a tam and kilt, dancing "The MacLincoln Highland Fling." For years thereafter, the Scotch cap would remain a staple of anti-Lincoln caricature, a reminder that once he suffered the worst indignity a Victorian-era gentleman could ever face: a public questioning of his manly courage.

After the inauguration, Lincoln embarked on the deadly serious business of restoring the fractured American Union and managing the bloodiest

'if i did not laugh, i should die.'

military struggle in world history. Still, the humorous assaults continued unabated. Further inspiration came as more and more Americans learned that the president himself enjoyed—and often told—funny stories. As early as 1858, his rival in Illinois politics and debate, Senator Stephen A. Douglas, had acknowledged his prowess with a joke, admitting: “Nothing else—not any of his arguments or any of Lincoln’s replies to my questions—disturbs me. But when he begins to tell a story, I feel that I am to be over-matched.” Once Lincoln entered the White House, accounts of his fondness for storytelling spread nationwide.

Lincoln’s admirers loved his down-to-earth style and earthy way with a comic tale. But foes leaped on such qualities as evidence of Lincoln’s coarseness and lack of dignity. One cartoon of the day featured him reacting to news of wartime slaughter by drawing: “That reminds me of a funny story.” Such caricatures used humor to make Lincoln’s humor a political liability.

CRITICISM NOTWITHSTANDING, Lincoln became an appreciative reader of the leading satirists of the day. He particularly enjoyed Charles F. Browne (who wrote under the pseudonym Artemus Ward), David R. Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby), and R. H. Newell (Orpheus C. Kerr). Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase remembered with huffy disbelief that the most momentous cabinet meeting of Lincoln’s entire administration—the one at which he announced he would issue his Emancipation Proclamation—began with the president reading a chapter from Artemus Ward’s latest book of stories and laughing heartily. “If I did not laugh,” Lincoln confided to a minister

who questioned his irreverence, “I should die.” That others were laughing at him as well as *with* him seemed to bother him little, if at all.

In one of his typical, dialect-rich comic essays, the fictional Ward visits the White House to find a babbling,

winder for fear he would rub the paint off the doorway. Wall, about this time there was a man in a adjacent town who had a green cotton umbreller.”

“Did it fit him well? Was it custom made? Was he measured for it?”

“Measured for what?” said Abe.

“The umbreller?”

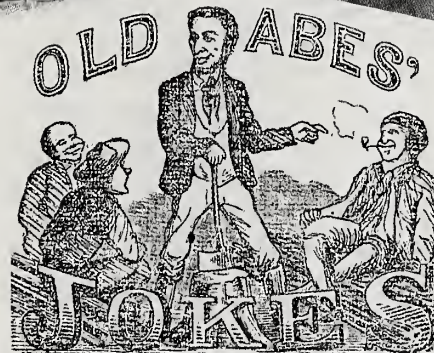
“Wall, as I was sayin,” continued the President, treatin the interruption with apparent contempt, “this man sed he’d known that there umbreller ever since it was a parasol. Ha, ha, ha.”

Lincoln always insisted he was a “retailer,” not a “wholesaler,” of the stories that made him famous. “I don’t make the stories

mine by telling them,” he modestly maintained. But such confessions did not stop publishers from issuing books like *Old Abe’s Jokerster* and *The Humors of Old Abe* while he was serving in the White House. Lincoln thus became the first president ever to inspire a joke book—poetic justice for a man who listed at least one joke collection among the favorite books of his youth.

Lincoln’s jesting ultimately did him as much harm as good. Writers twitted him with volumes like *Abraham Africanus I*, a raw satire accusing him of radical policies on race and tyrannical practices such as arbitrary arrests. Cartoonists continued their assaults as well. Some Confederate caricaturists portrayed him as Satan incarnate, hiding behind the avuncular mask of a bearded statesman. And some British artists depicted him disdainfully as a crafty bartender serving the public a mixture of “bunkum,” “bosh,” and “brag.”

The vigor of such attacks only increased as the bitter 1864 election campaign heated to a boil. A riotously funny 1864 campaign “biography,” *Only Authentic Life of Abraham Lincoln, Alias “Old Abe,”* described him

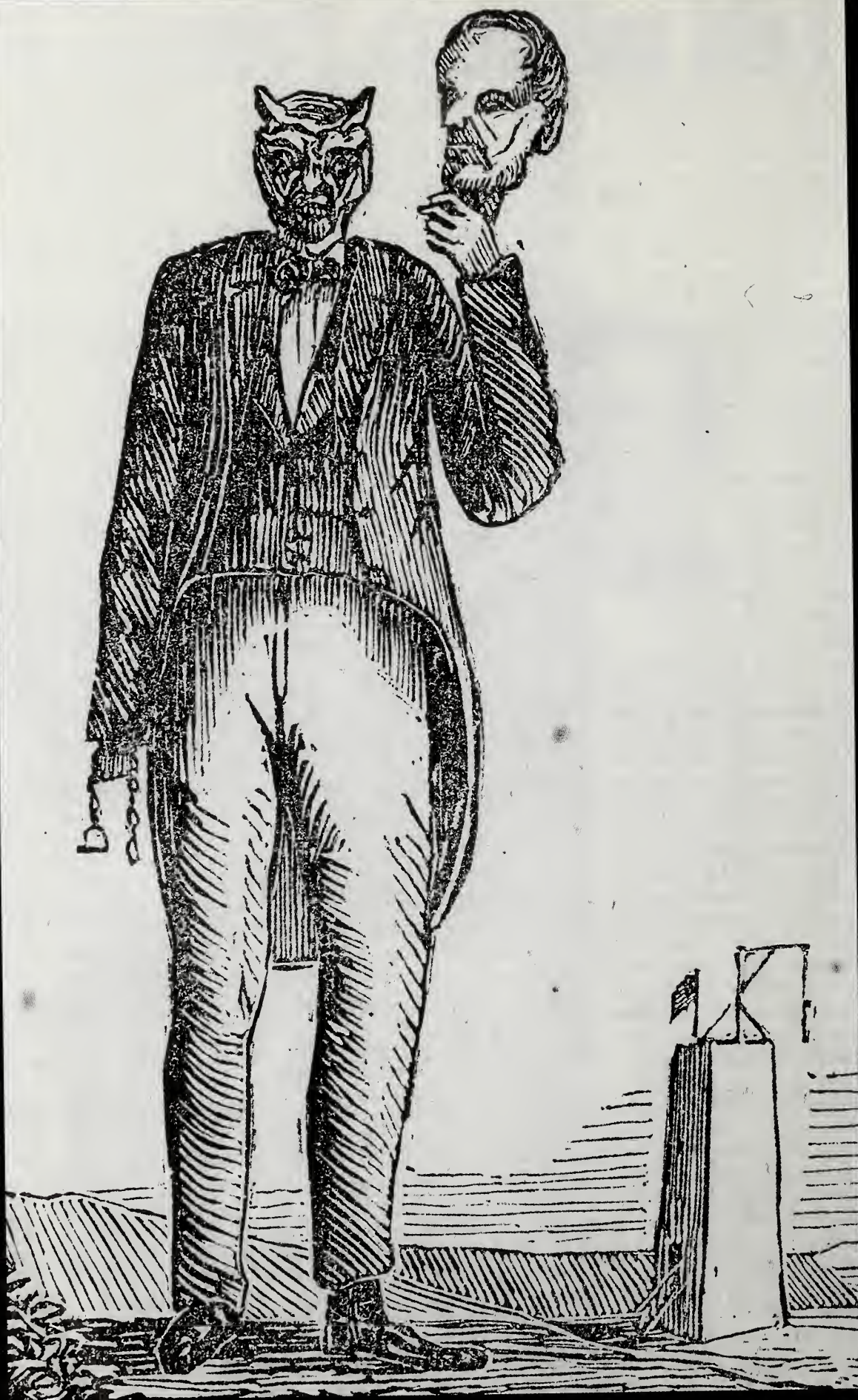


Fresh from Abraham's Bosom.
Comprising all his issues excepting the "Green Backs."
Mailed, post-paid, in Paper, 35 cts.; Muslin, 75 cts.
T. R. DAWLEY, Publisher, 13 Park Row, N. Y.

Lincoln's good sense of humor—as both listener and teller of jokes—helped him cope with the constant satirical attacks on him. He enjoyed reading humorists (from left) Petroleum V. Nasby, Orpheus C. Kerr, and Artemus Ward. And his own jokes appeared in various books such as *Old Abe's Jokes*.

confused president intent on telling his funny stories and blissfully unaware that they do not make much sense:

I called on Abe. He received me kindly. I handed him my umbreller, and told him I'd have a check for it if he pleased. "That," sed he, "puts me in mind of a little story. There was a man out in our parts who was so mean that he took his wife's coffin out of the back



HAROLD HOLZER

with acidic gusto:

Mr. Lincoln stands six feet twelve in his socks, which he changes once every ten days. His anatomy is composed mostly of bones, and when walking he resembles the offspring of a happy marriage between a derrick and a windmill.... His head is shaped something like a ruta-bago, and his complexion is that of a Saratoga trunk. His hands and feet are plenty large enough, and in society he has the air of having too many of them.... He could hardly be called handsome, though he is certainly much better looking since he had the smallpox.... He is 107 years old.

Some of the more vicious presidential campaign cartoons depicted Lincoln as a supporter of miscegenation (the period

term for race-mixing), a highly unpopular position at the time. One example showed him happily welcoming a mixed-race couple in a topsy-turvy society in which African Americans ride in carriages liveried by white servants. Such tableaux were meant to stir up a racist electorate by encouraging fears that a biracial society would be inevitable if Lincoln were reelected.

During his reelection campaign, Lincoln became enmeshed in a bizarre comic plot that might have caused considerable political fallout had he not sensed its potential danger. The episode began on September 29, 1864, when the author of the parody volume *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races* sent the president a complimentary copy with a letter ask-

BEHIND THE SCENES



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Along the same line of attack, several caricatures hinted that Lincoln had African heritage. One plate by Baltimore etcher Adalbert J. Volck showed the president as an Arabian dancer, veiled to conceal his ethnic features. And in an anonymous 1864 campaign cartoon, he was an actor on stage, portraying Shakespeare's evil Moor, Othello.

Lincoln took plenty of abuse for his sympathy toward black people. Above: The president takes the stage in blackface as Shakespeare's evil Moor Othello. Below: An artist depicts his vision of the race-mixing that would occur if Lincoln got his way. Opposite: The president removes his "Lincoln mask" to reveal the face of Satan, a favorite characterization of Lincoln satirists.

POLITICAL CARICATURE NO. 2.



MISCEGENATION
OR THE MILLENNIUM OF ABOLITIONISM.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ing for his endorsement. The author gushed, "Permit me to express the hope that, as the first four years of your administration have been distinguished by giving liberty to four millions of human beings, that the next four years may find these freedmen possessed of all the rights of citizenship...."

The author's trap failed to snare Lincoln, who saw through the wily attempt to secure a presidential declaration on racial integration that Democrats could then use to attack the Republicans. "This 'dodge' will hardly succeed," the *London Morning Herald* predicted, "for Mr. Lincoln is shrewd enough to say nothing on the unsavory subject." The newspaper was correct. The old

storyteller had a nose for a practical joke, and proved much too smart to allow this dangerous one to be played on him. Lincoln never replied to the anonymous letter. He simply pasted it into the inside cover of his copy of the *Miscegenation* book and filed it away without comment. It was found in his papers after his assassination.

THE "ABUSE...IN NEWSPAPERS," TO quote presidential secretary John Hay, rarely bothered Lincoln. At least once, however, a published item—a false report—pushed him close to losing his temper. In 1864, the anti-Lincoln New York *World* falsely reported that during a tour of the hallowed Antietam battlefield, the presi-

dent had requested a ribald song from his friend Ward Hill Lamon. "This makes a feller feel gloomy," the insensitive president was quoted to have said after inspecting the spot where 900 men had fallen. "...Can't you give us something to cheer us up? Give us song, and give us a lively one." Concluded the *World*: "If any Republican holds up his hands in horror, and says this story *can't* be true, we sympathize with him from the bottom of our soul; the story *can't* be true of any man fit for any office of trust, or even for decent society; but the story is every whit true of Abraham Lincoln, *incredible* and *impossible* as it may seem."

Lincoln was deeply pained by the suggestion—designed to sway the sol-

Perhaps the most vicious cartoon skewering of Lincoln shows him walking among the dead and wounded at Antietam and requesting a light-hearted song. Opposite: A lament for Lincoln's reelection shows the president as a phoenix rising from the ashes of several pillars of American democracy.



'If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made upon me, this shop might just as well be closed for any business.'

diers' vote—that he could have defiled hallowed ground littered with more dead and wounded than had ever fallen in a single day of fighting. He could not have been comforted by a pictorial accompaniment to that libel, a hostile campaign print depicting him clutching a Scotch cap as he stands among the swollen dead and bleeding wounded, urging a horrified companion to “sing us ‘Picayune Butler,’ or something else that’s funny.”

It was more than even Lincoln could endure. Still, he resisted his friend Lamon’s repeated calls that he issue a public denial. He refused to dignify the calumny with a response. When he did finally put pen to paper to write out his own version of his visit to Antietam, he quickly instructed Lamon to destroy the result. Perhaps the act of writing down his thoughts was his way of letting off steam.

Lincoln never escaped the bombardment of topical humor. When he won reelection, London *Punch* portrayed him as a phoenix rising from the ashes of ruined commerce, quashed civil liberties, and trampled states’ rights. Even his legendary love for the theater exposed him to ridicule. In August 1863, Lincoln wrote to thank the celebrated actor James Hackett for a copy of his new book on his favorite stage roles. Lincoln had his *own* favorites, and his thank-you letter frankly expressed his views, including his judgment that “nothing equals Macbeth.”

Hackett made the error of publishing Lincoln’s communication as a means of enhancing his own reputation. The result provoked howls of laughter from the press, which mercilessly derided Lincoln for his ama-

teurish taste. A mortified Hackett wrote back to Lincoln to apologize for the efforts by the “Newspaper-Presses in publishing your kind, sensible, & unpretending letter...accompanied by satirical abuse.”

Lincoln replied to reassure Hackett that the affair had not upset him. “Give yourself no uneasiness,” he counseled the actor, adding that he was not “much shocked by the newspaper comments.” His skin had long ago grown thick enough to withstand the satirical

Modern Americans should be used to it, too. American presidents from John Adams to Bill Clinton—Lincoln among them—have been subjected with oppressive regularity to ridicule, both poisoned with malice and not. Most learn to ignore it. “If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made upon me,” Lincoln wrote, “this shop might just as well be closed for any business....”

America’s first humorist-president became one of its most often parodied presidents as well. But Lincoln apparently had less trouble accepting such taunts than do modern Americans scandalized by the likes of *Desmond Pfeiffer*; just as he could tell a joke, he could also take one. And he knew that triumph is a target’s best friend. “If the end brings me out right, what is said against me won’t amount to anything,” he pointed out. “If the end brings me out wrong, ten thousand angels swearing I was right wouldn’t make any difference.”

Perhaps Lincoln’s optimism stemmed in part from a realization that humorists make a difference. That was true then as well as now. Purveyors of wit can provide a troubled people an occasional laugh in the midst of great tragedy.

Besides, Americans who laughed at Lincoln could always be comforted by the fact that the president laughed at himself. **CWT**

HAROLD HOLZER *has written and edited numerous books about the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln. Among the latest is the compilation* Abraham Lincoln, the Writer: A Treasury of His Greatest Speeches and Letters *(Boyd’s Mills Press, 2000).*



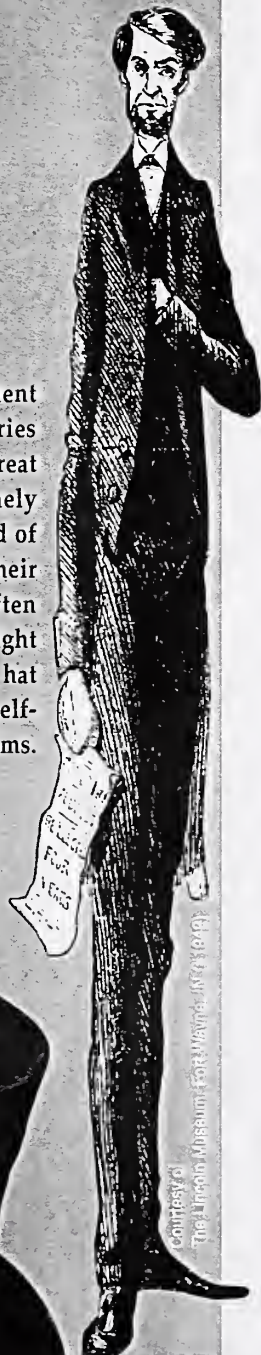
abuse fired at him during his 30 years in the political trenches.

As Lincoln touchingly expressed it, the endless taunts were but “a fair specimen of what has occurred to me through life.... I have endured a great deal of ridicule without much malice; and have received a great deal of kindness, not quite free from ridicule. I am used to it.”

Share Wisdom and Wit

The Declaration of Independence was ready to sign.

Many of President Lincoln's adversaries made light of his great height and homely appearance. Instead of taking offense at their comments, he often exaggerated his height with his tall silk hat and even made self-deprecating witticisms.



It was a sober moment in Congress. If caught, the members would be condemned for treason for signing that declaration. Yet even at an hour as momentous as this, there was one man who saw humor in the proceedings.

As John Hancock stood to sign the weighty document, Ben Franklin interrupted with his famous wit. "Now we must all hang together," he remarked, "or we will certainly hang separately." Franklin had capsulized the desperation of their plight precisely, but he did it with a surprising note of humor.

Life is full of humor, even in some of the most stressful circumstances. And finding the lighter side of life is a healthy exercise of joyfulness.

Abraham Lincoln was another master of humor in dark hours. Yet there was more than a jolly personality at work there: there was candid wisdom.

Consider three lessons on the wisdom of humor from Abraham Lincoln:

Humor Alleviates Animosity Lincoln faced constant criticism. He was called a clown, a baboon, and a lunatic. One paper castigated him as "[the] most dishonest politician that ever disgraced an office in America." Lincoln felt these attacks acutely, but he often used humor to respond.

During one debate, Lincoln was accused of being a "two-faced man." Lincoln's reply: "I leave it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I would wear this one?" The crowd erupted in laughter.

It was not simply public sentiment that Lincoln assuaged with his wit

(though public opinion was important to him). Lincoln's humor also enabled him to disarm *his own* hard feelings. Humor enabled Lincoln to respond to attackers without being drawn into a fight. Used wisely, humor can be a tool for avoiding unnecessary conflict.

Humor Makes a Point Clear Lincoln also found that a dose of common sense clothed in humor was an effective way to make his point clear.

When a general proposed sending troops deep into enemy territory, Lincoln replied with a story. He told of a barrel maker whose barrels kept collapsing as he tightened the straps. At last, his son crawled inside a barrel to hold the cover from caving in while the father secured it. "Only when the job was completed by this inner support," Lincoln ended, "the new problem arose: how to get the boy out?"

It was a silly story, really, but the general got the point: he had no exit strategy for the armies once engaged. Lincoln used humor to make his point both clear and memorable.

Humor Relieves Tension When asked by a friend at a sober moment why he was always telling stories and jokes, Lincoln replied thus: "I laugh because I must not cry; that is all—that is all."

Life is full of stress and pain. Few have felt life's sorrows more intensely than did Abraham Lincoln. But there is also humor to be found in life. And it is a mark of a genuinely joyful individual to "lighten up" and strengthen the heart with the wise use of humor.

THE NEW YORKER

- « The Daily Cartoon: Monday, November 26th
- Main

November 28, 2012

Lincoln's Smile

Posted by *Robert Mankoff*

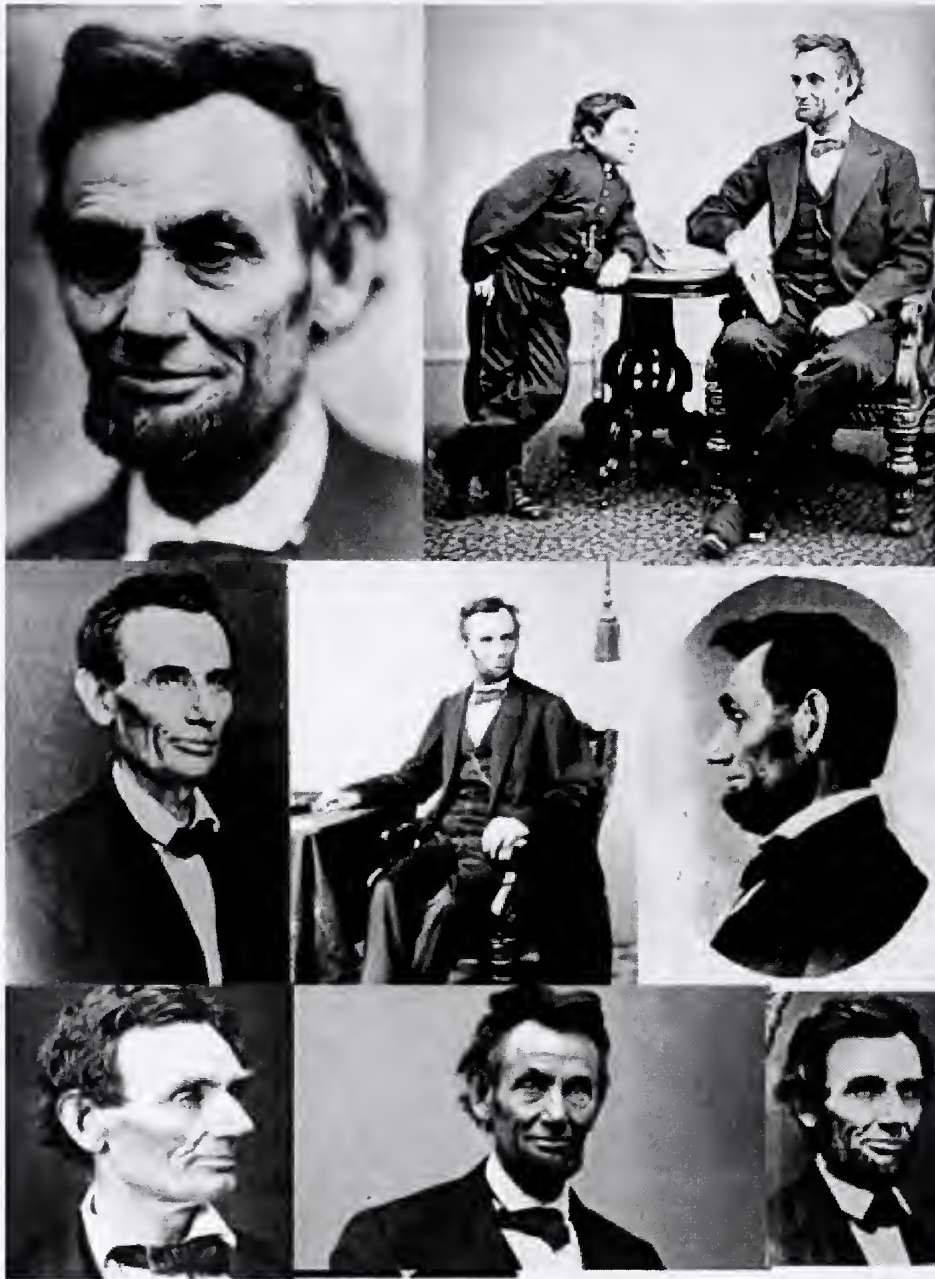
Something that has always intrigued me about Abraham Lincoln is, not surprisingly, his sense of humor. As far as I can tell, he's the first American President to have one.

That's because the term "sense of humor" really wasn't in common usage until the eighteen-sixties and seventies. In the eighteen-forties and fifties, it was called "the sense of the ridiculous," and didn't have the positive connotations that "sense of humor" has today. Back then, what was ridiculous was what invited ridicule. Funniness and cruelty went hand in hand. Of course, they still do a lot of arm-in-arm strolling in our day as well.

In the movie "Lincoln," Tommy Lee Jones, as the sarcastically vilifying Thaddeus Stevens, exemplifies the funny-cruel connection. Many of his vilifications were too nasty for the *Congressional Globe* (predecessor of the *Congressional Record*), but this one was recorded: "There was a gentleman from the far West sitting next to me, but he went away and the seat seems just as clean as it was before."

Lincoln's humor was very different because, for one thing, it was actually "humor" as the word was defined in his time. We don't make the distinction between "wit" and "humor" anymore, but in the nineteenth century people did. Wit was sarcastic and antipathetic while humor was congenial and empathetic. It's the difference we note now when we distinguish between "laughing with" and "laughing at." Lincoln was much more about "laughing with" than "laughing at." And when "laughing at," it was often himself he was mocking.

In the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, when Douglas accused Lincoln of being two-faced, Lincoln replied, referencing his homeliness, "Honestly, if I were two-faced, would I be showing you this one?" And, in a way, Lincoln's face itself tells us much about his sense of humor.



You can comb through thousands of photographs of politicians, soldiers, and the like from Lincoln's time and not find a single smile. Here's his sourpussed cabinet:



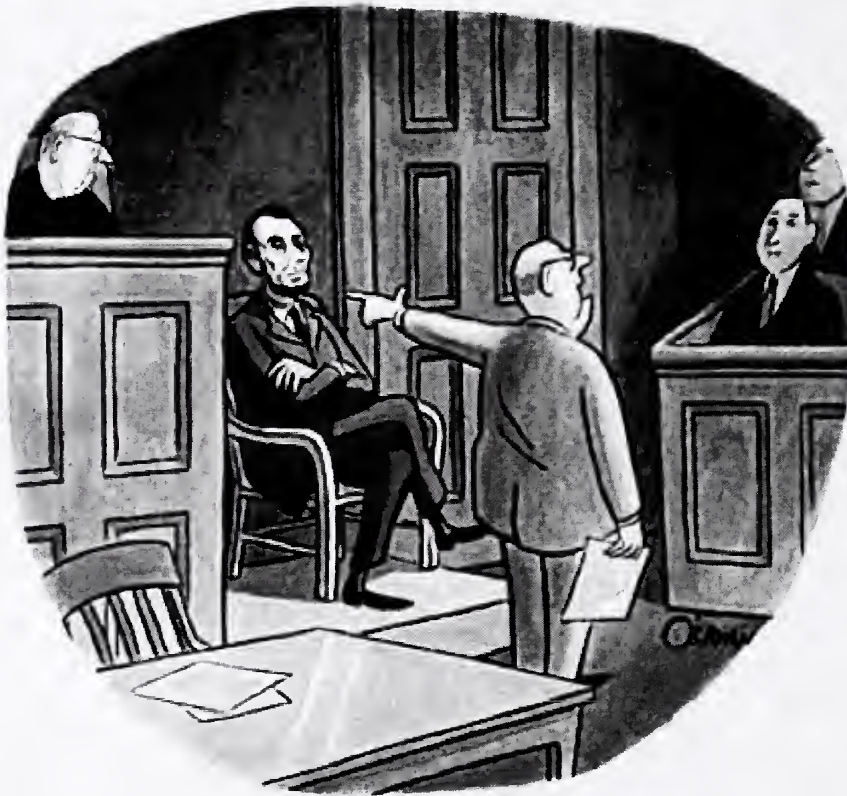
True, the extended exposures required for photographs of that era made smiling difficult. Yet Lincoln alone, as far as I can tell, overcame that difficulty. And though there is only a hint of smile in his photographs, it hints at what Lincoln knew too well: that, as Mark Twain pointed out, “the secret source of humor is not joy but sorrow.”

Interestingly, while having a sense of humor, or at least the appearance of one provided by comedy writers, has become a necessary characteristic for an American President in our time, in the nineteenth century, too much humor was considered a liability. And that was the case for Lincoln. A journalist covering the Lincoln-Douglas debates commented that “I could not take a real personal liking to the man, owing to an inborn weakness for which he was even then notorious and so remained during his great public career, he was inordinately fond of jokes, anecdotes, and stories.”

So here’s hoping that he would be inordinately fond of some of these *New Yorker* cartoons about him. Or at least smile upon them.



"If you two don't quit arguing with each other, I'm gonna throw you both right out of here!"



"I ask you, gentlemen, is that the face of a dishonest man?"

COACHING THE LITTLE GIANT



"O.K. Now, if he comes at you with 'A house divided against itself cannot stand,' what's your reply?"



"Mary, is the twelfth George Washington's birthday or is it mine?"

POSTED IN

- From the Desk of Bob Mankoff

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SUBMIT

1 June

AT CABINET MEETING

Lincoln Opened and Closed Important Session With Tales

President Lincoln opened and closed one of the most important Cabinet meetings of his administration with funny stories. It was the meeting held September 22, 1862, when he laid before the Cabinet his draft of the emancipation proclamation. The President was in good humor and began the session by reading a particularly humorous chapter from a new book by Artemus Ward. At the conclusion of the discussion of the proclamation, Salmon P. Chase, then Secretary of the Treasury, recalled in his memoirs the remarks of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton reminded Lincoln of a story and he told it. A farmer's hired man came rushing in and told his employer one of his oxen had fallen dead in the yoke. When the farmer began to tell him what to do the hired man broke in with "but the other ox has fallen down dead, too." Asked why he had not told the entire disaster in the first place, he replied that he did not want to overcome his employer by too much bad news.—[Kansas City Star.]

PRESIDENT LINCOLN WAS A BORN MIMIC

Martyred President Spent Pre-
paratory Years In Indiana
Free From Restraint.

(From the Indianapolis News.)

A chapter in the life of Lincoln that is of more than ordinary value because some of the material is declared to be new is contributed to the Indiana Magazine of History by Rev. J. Edward Murr.

Mr. Murr has had opportunities for collecting data about Lincoln that most of his biographers apparently overlooked. The minister lived for many years in Spencer county. He knew the relatives of Lincoln, and he has talked with numerous persons who knew him during the time the Lincoln family lived near Gentryville. Many of these persons never had talked to a newspaper reporter, much less to one of the biographers of Lincoln.

Too little attention has been paid, Mr. Murr thinks, to Lincoln's life when he was growing to young manhood in Southern Indiana. Many biographers have been content to pass over this and assume that he never did anything of importance until he entered political life in Illinois.

Free Life Of A Pioneer.

"Since Lincoln was destined to rise by the sheer force of his own personality and imperious will," says the writer, "and to develop the great qualities of mind in this almost unbelievable manner, it was his good fortune to spend those years of

strange preparations among a simple minded, yet honest and patriotic folk, hedged in by a wilderness, but freed thereby from those conventional restraints and hindrances that older and more settled communities usually impose. At the same time he was removed from the blighting effects of vice which, had he been subjected to it, might have prevented the maturing of a character embodying all of the essential basic elements of the plain people. Lincoln did not, as some have supposed, live the cabin life in the White House so much as he lived the White House life in the cabin."

Lincoln A Born Mimic.

Numerous biographers have attempted to show that Lincoln cared little for religion, and that he frequently made fun of ministers by repeating their sermons, with extra flourishes and witty remarks. This is denied by Mr. Murr. He points out that Lincoln, although only 11 years old at the time, helped to build the Little Pigeon Baptist Church, which was the first church in his neighborhood. Lincoln was a born mimic, and frequently, after a sermon was finished, the future President would repeat it, word for word, together with the gestures and the peculiar inflections of the minister. But Mr. Murr does not believe this was done simply to be doing something funny.

Even at that early date Lincoln was fond of public speaking. He spoke whenever he had an opportunity, and nothing pleased him any better than repeating Sunday's sermon to the men at work in the fields on Monday morning. His father even had to tell him that this practice must be stopped because the "hired men" frequently neglected their work.

Hummer

A Story Was More Than Story to Lincoln

PERHAPS more than any other man who has served as President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, who was born in a Kentucky cabin 148 years ago, was a story teller with a deep and abiding sense of humor.

His opponents of the time tried to ridicule him as a story-telling, backwoods buffoon; history now paints him as a man of the people who never lost the common touch, a touch best expressed through his homely stories and his sense of humor.

Moreover, some biographers have said that this sense of humor was one of the things that enabled Lincoln to survive the trials of his tragic years in office.

For to Lincoln a story was more than just a story. It was an instrument of illustration and of emphasis. The many biographies of his life are filled with ex-

amples of how time and again he came up with a story that not only illustrated a specific situation, but that also broke mounting tensions.

As an example, early in 1863, an entire Union Army was besieged and feared lost in Tennessee. A crisis meeting of the Cabinet was in session when word was received from the Army. It was, the report stated, short on rations, ammunition was about gone and the enemy near in force.

Sigh of Relief

"That's good," Lincoln said with a deep sigh of relief. "In a situation such as this, I'm like the woman with so many children she couldn't keep up with them all."

"Every time one would cry,

By JOE CREASON, Courier-Journal Staff Writer

she'd say, 'There's one of my children that isn't dead yet.'"

Another time Government officials were pressing him strongly for more money for their departments.

"Gentlemen," Lincoln said, "you are a lot like the man whose home burned and whose neighbors came to help them get started again by giving him items."

"Soon he was better off than he had ever been. Other neighbors came with furniture, pots and pans and the like, but he thanked them and said, 'I'm not taking anything but money now.'"

Some of the most violent criticisms aimed at Lincoln came from New England. One man especially critical. Finally Lincoln wrote him a long letter that contained this passage:

"A traveler on the frontier found himself, as night came on, in a wild region. A terrible thunderstorm added to his trouble. He floundered along until his horse gave out. The lightning afforded the only clue to the path, and the crashes of thunder were frightful. One bolt, which seemed to crush the earth beneath him, made him stagger to his knees."

"Being by no means a praying man, his petition was short and to the point.

"'Oh, Lord,' he prayed, 'if it's all the same to you, give a little more light and a little less noise.'"

The drivers said they were suspended drivers were re and were offered an apology Company President R. O. Waring, told of the drivers' mand, said, "They certainly w stay out a long time."

100,000 Affected

The strike against Memphis Street Railway caught the approximately 100,000 daily riders flat-footed. It added the already congested rush-hour traffic situation.

Many transit riders were waiting at bus stops when told company supervisory personnel and passing motorists that bus weren't running.

Local television and radio stations interrupted their early morning programs with frequent announcements that the driver had struck and asking motorists to share their automobiles.

By 8:30 a.m. most of those waiting for buses had either caught rides, made other arrangements, or returned home. Taxi companies operated at maximum capacity, but were have something to say to everybody, and no one comes to see me."

At times Lincoln had trouble with several of his highest ranking generals, especially General George B. McClellan, who often ignored orders from the President. After one such instance, Lincoln sent McClellan a letter.

"If you don't want to use your army," he wrote, "I should like to borrow it for a while."

Furious at General

After the Battle of Antietam, when McClellan ignored orders to engage in the fight, Lincoln was furious.

"That isn't the Army of the Potomac," he fumed, "it's McClellan's bodyguard."

The exact size of the Confederate Army was never known in Washington. At a Cabinet meeting it was the topic of discussion.

"If we have 400,000 men in arms, then the Confederates must have at least 1,200,000," Lincoln figured, "because every time they are defeated my generals claim they were outnumbered three to one."

All of which caused Lincoln to come up with a classic remark after he had seen P. T. Barnum's show, featuring General Tom Thumb and Admiral Nutt.

"Mr. Barnum," he said after the show, "you have some pretty small officers, but I think I can beat you."

With the war moving to a

"What a pity," he confided to

LINCOLN IS RANKED WITH FAMOUS AMERICAN WITS

N. Y. Psychoanalyst
Emancipator Eviden-
dotes He Enjoye

TORONTO, June 5 ()

a "schizoid-manic personal-
his baser nature under rigid
Association meeting today.

The analysis was read by Dr. A. A. Brill, a psychoanalyst of New York city.

When an abstract of Dr. Brill's speech appeared in the program of the association last month, it brought a bitter protest from Dr. Edward E. Hicks, prominent Brooklyn psychiatrist, who described the allusions in Lincoln as "insulting." Dr. Hicks entered a formal protest against the speech with officers of the association.

Schizoid is a word of Greek derivation meaning to split, and the expression applied to Lincoln does not mean insanity. Dr. Brill found the trace of dual personality in a reputed tendency to tell off-color anecdotes, which bubbled up as part of Lincoln's humor. The split, personality source was traced to his conflicting inheritance from his mother and father, two natures "that never became fused in him."

Dr. Brill ranked Lincoln as a wit with Mark Twain, Uncle Remus, and other great American humorists. He confined his study to the emotional side of the Emancipator.

"What is very peculiar about Lincoln's stories and jokes," said Dr. Brill, "his own and those he appropriated from others, is the fact that many, if not most, are of an aggressive or algolagnic nature, treating of pain, suffering and death, and that a great many of them were so frankly sexual as to be classed as obscene. Most of his biographers speak of the latter, but are at a loss to explain why Lincoln resorted to this form of wit.

"Thus, Beveridge remarked that he had faults extremely human, such as his love of a certain type of anecdote, a taste which he never overcame and the expression of which, as will appear, was so marked a feature of his manhood and so shocking to the eminent men among whom he did his historic work."

Dr. Brill named as other authorities for the anecdotes "Carl Sandburg quoting Henry Villard," and Dr. Holland's Abraham Lincoln.

"Looking at this behavior with present day eyes," Dr. Brill said, "I cannot be shocked by any of Lincoln's stories that I heard or read. To be sure he called a spade, a spade, and having been brought up in the back woods of pioneer days, he did not possess the inhibiting influences of a New England environment.

"Lincoln had to cope with enormous trials and vicissitudes, poor heredity from his father's side, humble birth, abject poverty, struggle for education, and an unsatisfied love life.

"But despite these handicaps, he attained the highest ambition of any American. Nevertheless, throughout his life he was unable to disburden himself of his depressive moods."

Brill says there are "many authorities" for the existence of these moods, described variously as the blues, melancholy, abstraction, and mental depression.

"To any psychiatrist," Dr. Brill says, "the above mentioned descriptions are quite plain. We know that in the ordinary case of manic depressive psychosis, the depressions are often followed by a phase of elation. As far as my investigations go, no distinct manic attacks were ever observed in Lincoln."

"Judging by all the descriptions given of Lincoln's depressions, I feel that all one can say is that he was a schizoid manic personality, now and then harassed by schizoid manic moods. These moods never reached to that degree of profundity to justify the diagnosis of insanity. At all times Lincoln remained in touch with reality, his ego never sought refuge in insanity."

DEFENDS LINCOLN STORIES AS RURAL FOLK LORE

NEW YORK, June 5 (AP)—Dr. Edward E. Hicks, Brooklyn psychiatrist who protested against the speech of Dr. A. A. Brill, psychoanalyst, at Toronto today, has added further refutation to Dr. Brill's statements that some of Abraham Lincoln's humor was "off color."

The Lincoln anecdotes, Dr. Hicks said today, were "farm folk lore familiar in Greek plays in 500 B. C., and are still being told in rural America."

Dr. Hicks, after reading an abstract of Dr. Brill's speech which among other things stated that Lincoln was a "schizoid manic personality" whose baser nature was under rigid control, previously had asked that the speech be stricken from the program.

Subsequent discussion of the matter, according to Dr. Hicks, brought similar protests from all parts of the country. Dr. Hicks charged Dr. Brill's statements were "insulting." Today he said:

"The anecdotes of Lincoln were not obscene at all except to modern taste as developed in cities.

"I have been in communication with people who were brought up in the middlewest where Lincoln was born and raised. They tell me the stories Lincoln told were familiar in Greek plays in 500 B. C. which have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

"If some of the critics of Lincoln would go out into the country they would find the same stories Lincoln told still current."

LINCOLN AS A JOKER.

Col. Thos. H. Nelson Tells How He and Governor Hammond were "Sold" by Lincoln.

At the old settlers' meeting at the opera house, Colonel Thomas H. Nelson told an amusing reminiscence of his first acquaintance with Mr. Lincoln. In the spring of 1849 Nelson and Judge Abram Hammond, who was afterward governor of Indiana, arranged to go from this city to Indianapolis together in the stage coach. This was before the epoch of railways and an entire day was usually consumed in the journey. Before the dawn of day the coach arrived in front of the Terre Haute house, and as these gentlemen were about to step in they discovered that the entire back seat was occupied by a long, sloomy individual whose head protruded from one side of the coach and his feet from the other. He was the sole occupant and was sleeping soundly. Hammond slapped him familiarly on the shoulder and asked him if he had chartered the stage for the day. The stranger, now wide awake, said, "certainly not," and at once took the front seat, after politely asking the gentlemen to take the place of honor and comfort, which they accordingly did. As daylight advanced they thought they took in their traveling companion at a glance. A queer, odd looking fellow he was, dressed in a well-worn and ill fitting suit of bombazine, without vest or cravat, and a twenty-five cent palm hat on the back of his head. His very prominent features in repose, seemed dull and expressionless. Here was a rare chance for fun, and the gentlemen soon availed themselves of it! It was not long after the quizzing commenced before they discovered that the stranger was "greener" and a better subject for merriment than they expected. They got off many jokes and "sells." He took them all with the utmost innocence and good nature and joined in the laugh, although at his own expense. In fact, he seemed to be rather awed in the presence of such eminent men. At noon they stopped at a wayside hostelry for dinner. The rain was falling and the ground was muddy. The stranger sprang from the coach, entered the inn and returned with a plauk and an umbrella and the gentlemen, one after another, were as daintily handed into the house as if they had been ladies, he walking in the rain and mud. When dinner was announced the gentlemen took their seats and he remained standing, until Hammond, in a patronizing way, said, "Sit down, my good fellow, and eat with us." He appeared to think that it was about the greatest honor of his life, and he sat down with about half of his person on a small chair and held his hat under his arm during the meal. On being asked if he had ever been in as large a town as Terre Haute before he said that several ago he had driven an ox-wagon

containing a family of movers through Terre Haute on their way from Bloomington, Indiana, to Paris, Illinois, for which he was paid \$3.50. He said also that he had been in Washington City, about which many surprising things had been said by the gentlemen, but he didn't know much about it as he could not move in the same circles of society as his distinguished traveling companions.

Resuming their journey after dinner, conversation drifted into a discussion of the comet, a subject that was then agitating the scientific world, in which the stranger took the deepest interest. He made many startling suggestions, and asked many questions showing profound ignorance of the wonderful phenomenon. Nelson amazed him with "words of learned length and thundering sound," talked about the attractions of gravitation and cohesion, centripetal and centrifugal forces, etc., etc. After an astounding display of wordy pyrotechnics, the now dazed and bewildered stranger asked:

"What is going to be the upshot of this comet business?"

Mr. Nelson replied that he was not quite certain, that he differed from most scientists and philosophers, but that in his private opinion, the world would follow the darned thing off! The stranger exhibited much alarm and anxiety at the prospect of such an appalling catastrophe.

They arrived at Indianapolis late in the afternoon and stopped at Browning's hotel. The gentlemen repaired to their rooms to improve their costumes. In a few minutes Mr. Nelson descended to the portico and descried his long, sloomy fellow traveler in the center of an admiring group of lawyers, among whom were Judge McLean, Judge Huntington, Mr. Hannigan, Albert S. White and Col. Thompson who were all amused and interested in a funny story he was telling. He frequently mentioned the name of Hammond and Nelson and was several times interrupted by roars of laughter. Nelson called out Browning, the landlord, and asked:

"Who is that chap who is creating so much sport at our expense?"

"Don't you know him," said Browning. "That's Abe Lincoln, of Illinois, the greatest practical joker on the continent!"

That was a crusher! Mr. Nelson rushed up stairs and told Hammond who was still at his toilet that they would be the laughing stock of the whole state, that they had been completely outwitted by our green-horn friend who was, no less a personage than that inimitable wag, Abe Lincoln, of Illinois, who was then convulsing our legal friends on the portico by an account of our journey. Hammond rapidly gathered up his duds, pushed them into his carpet sack and suddenly left the hotel by the back door, going down a muddy alley to the Palmer house, from

which he did not emerge for several days.

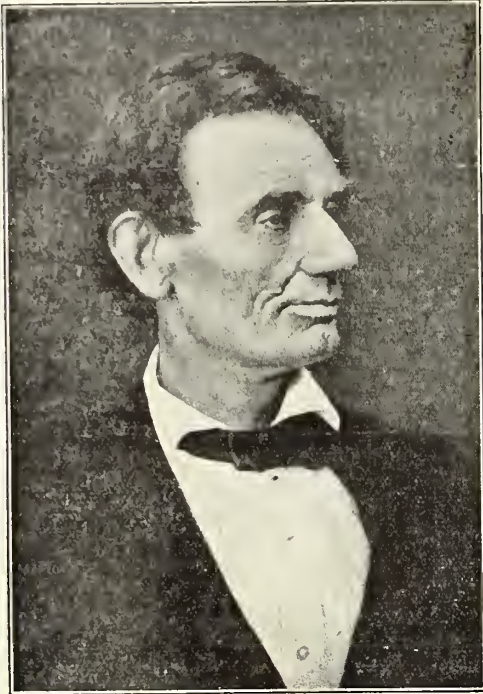
Curiously enough, Hammond was governor of the state when Lincoln arrived at Indianapolis, on his way to Washington to be inaugurated as president, but remembering our famous journey, and fearing ridicule, he discreetly left the city and did not return until after Lincoln's departure.

Nelson had many opportunities after the stage ride to cultivate Mr. Lincoln's acquaintance and friendship, and was a zealous advocate of his nomination and election to the presidency. Before leaving his home for Washington, Mr. Lincoln caused Usher and Nelson, of this city, to be invited to accompany him. They agreed to join him at Indianapolis. On reaching that city, the presidential party had already arrived, and upon inquiry, they were informed that the president-elect was in the dining room at supper. Passing through, they saw that every seat at the numerous tables was occupied, but they failed to find Mr. Lincoln. As they were nearing the door to the office of the hotel, a long arm reached out to Nelson's shoulder and a shrill voice exclaimed:

"Hello! Nelson; do you think, after all, that the world is going to follow the darned thing off?"

It was Mr. Lincoln.

THE GREATEST LIBERATOR



A likeness of Abraham Lincoln, whose birthday is to be celebrated by all Americans on February 12, 1938.

Tributes to Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of the United States, was born in Hardin county, Kentucky, Feb. 12, 1809, and was inaugurated president in 1861.

Altho time has not dimmed the greatest of his achievements, marred the loftiness of his character nor erased the quality and application of his noble idealism, it is interesting, even at this late date, to note what men of wisdom, many of whom did not live in Lincoln's generation, have to say, and the following quotations are of particular importance and moment since this month the nation honors his birthday:

Lloyd George said:

"I wonder whether I will be forgiven for saying that George Washington was a great American, but Abraham Lincoln belongs to the common people of every land."

Phillip Brooks, the minister, wrote:

"He (Lincoln) vindicated the greatness of real goodness and the goodness of real greatness."

Emil Ludwig, French biographer of Lincoln, expressed himself as follows:

"I see him like Shakespeare's characters, absolutely original, comparable to none, memorably unique."

Francis Fisher Browne, Lincoln biographer, wrote:

"The name of Lincoln is the most distinguished that has yet been written in American history."

Basil Williams, another American biographer of the man, declared:

"His place is among the great men of the earth."

And that exact, accurate and impartial book,

the Encyclopedia Britannica, affirms the following:

"It is hard to believe that Lincoln was at any time a genuine skeptic. His temper was essentially religious."

The International Encyclopedia states:

"He conquered by the power of truth."

One of the greatest tributes to Lincoln was written by James Russell Lowell, one of America's noble bards, and is included in Lowell's Commemoration Ode and follows:

"How beautiful to see

Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
Who loved his charge but never loved to lead."

Stories That Made Lincoln Smile

One day a baby was born next door and the doctor borrowed a fish dealer's scales to weigh the baby. It weighed 47 pounds!

A gray-haired lover was courting a young girl. When asked by a neighbor how the affair was progressing he answered. "All right."

The neighbor asked then: "Has she called you honey yet?"

The old man replied: "Well, not exactly that, but she called me the next thing to it. She has called me 'old beeswax!'"

The following story, accredited to Ward, the famous humorist, had to do with an aristocratic lady. Ward stepped up to the woman at a dance and said: "You're a very handsome woman."

The compliment was considered by the lady to be insolence and she retorted: "I wish I could say the same thing of you."

Ward was quick to answer: "Well, you could if you were as big a liar as I am."

There was a boys' club in Boston which did not take in any members who were not Irish. A boy asked to be admitted to the club. He was asked: "Are you Irish?" "Oh, yes," replied the boy. "I am Irish." "What is your name?" "My name is Ikey Einstein."

Tad, the son of Lincoln, once asked Ward in Lincoln's presence: "How did Adam get out of Eden?" "Adam was 'snaked' out," the humorist replied.

Lincoln once quoted Ward saying at a cabinet meeting as follows: "He was willing, if need be, to sacrifice all his wife's relations for his country."

The Bear Hunt

By Abraham Lincoln.

(That Lincoln wrote verse, poetry as he termed it, is a fact that is not generally known, and the following selection reveals that the great liberator of the slaves practiced the scribbling of verses in his youth. The Bear Hunt is one of his sustained poetical flights and consists of 22 stanzas and several of them are printed below in order to give the Live Oak readers an opportunity to judge Lincoln in a new light, that of a poet.

A wild bear chase didst never see?

Then hast thou lived in vain—

Thy richest bump of glorious glee
Lies desert in thy brain.

When first my father settled here,
'Twas then the frontier line;
The panther's scream filled night with fear
And bears preyed on the swine.

But woe for bruin's short-lived fun
When rose the squealing cry;
Now man and horse, with dog and gun
Rush where the bear scents lie."

In commenting on this verse, one of Lincoln's biographers say: "Three verses get the bear to running. nine verses have the bear chased, four have him fighting and dying, and then six verses draw a moral and a lesson." After the death of the bear Lincoln scribbles on:

And now a dinsome clamor rose.

'But who should have his skin?'

Who first draws blood, each hunter knows
This prize must always win.

But, who did this, and how to trace

What's true from what's a lie—

Like lawyers in a murder case

They stoutly argufy.

Tad's Kid Goat and
the Joke on Old Abe

Editor's Note: Mr. Terry L. Frohriep, 117 South Johnson Street, Garrett, Indiana, has a collection of Civil War letters written by his distant relative, Frank M. Potter, 122 New York Regiment, Army of the Potomac. Potter had been wounded in the hand in the Battle of the Wilderness, and he was placed in Ward 5 of the Columbian Hospital in Washington, D.C.

On July 22, 1864, Potter wrote to his father and among other things, he related the story about Tad and the kid goat, and thinking the story was interesting, he suggested that it be published in one of the Marshall, Michigan newspapers. It is not known whether or not this was done.

Mr. Frohriep has granted permission for the story to appear in Lincoln Lore. The letter has been copied as it was written, with no effort being made to improve the grammar, spelling and punctuation.

R. G. M.

" . . . it seems little Tad had a kid and he had ran away. well who ever got it sold it to a widow woman just below this hospt. for five dollars. One evening as Abe and Mrs. Lincoln and Tad were going up to the soldiers home Tad see his kid and had the team stoped and the driver was requested to get out and pick up the kid but when Cuffee went to pick up the kid he

had a woman to deal with so the President said he was shure it was his kid well says the woman give me 6 dollars and you can have it he was not disposed to pay for his own goat so he drove on but it seemed Tad was bound to have his kid. for the next morn they stoped to banter the woman again but no go. she had paid 5 dollars for it and she must make a dollar on it if she let it go. Cuff got down again advanced up to the kid. the woman came out says she you dam nigger dont touch that kid. yes says he but it is the Presidents kid and he told me to get it. well says she I dont care for you or the President. if the President sees fit to give me 6 dollars for the kid he can have it. if not you keep your hands off from the kid. at night when Abe and Tad came back they stoped and the President gave the woman 6 dollars for his lost kid and Tad rode by with the kid in his arms and Tad in his fathers lap I think the joke was rather against old Abe that time to have to pay 6 dollars for his own kid

"Now as the above has made some fun here I thought it worth publishing as Abe is quite noted for his jokes you see here he got the joke on him and I propose to you to go and have it published in one of the Marshall papers if you think it worth while what I have related I know to be true part by personal observation and the rest from the woman herself. she keeps a fruit stand near here .~~I had a letter~~

LINCOLN'S HUMOR

Brian Alexander

We Americans like our Presidents to have certain mannerisms and characteristics that we can identify with our own. Such traits bring our heroes down to earth, add a human element to their character, and help keep alive the legend that we are all potted from the same clay. For example, Lyndon Johnson was fond of dogs, William Howard Taft was a great eater, John Kennedy liked to play touch football, and Abraham Lincoln liked to tell funny stories.

It comes as no surprise that Abraham Lincoln's storytelling is among the most appealing and popular aspects of his character. Certainly we admire and respect him for his noble manner, remarkable attainments, and undying patriotism--but he is beloved and endeared in the hearts of his countrymen in large measure because he embodied many of those human qualities and frailties familiar to all. And certainly ~~his~~ his storytelling is one such quality.

When discussing Lincoln's humor we are confronted with two difficulties. First of all, many of the stories attributed to Lincoln were, in fact, never told by him. Lincoln once told newspaperman Noah Brooks that only about one sixth of all stories credited to him were ones he actually told. While Lincoln was President, almost any good joke, and many bad ones, were credited to him. Publishers issued such books as Lincolniana, or Humors of Uncle Abraham, Old Abe's Jokes, Fresh

from Abraham's Bosom; Wit at the White House, and many others. Most of these jokes Lincoln never told, but were provided by enterprising publishers to the reading public.

The second difficulty rests in the fact that the success or effectiveness of a good story relies heavily upon the manner of its telling. For instance, it is possible that we may not be at all amused by reading Lincoln's stories or hearing them at secondhand--but we might have split our sides laughing had we heard the stories as he told them. "His stories may be literally retold," wrote his friend Henry C. Whitney, "every word, period and comma, but the real humor perished with Lincoln," for "he provoked as much laughter by the grotesque expression of his homely face as by the abstract fun of his stories."

As a young man Lincoln lived in small villages and towns, and one of the favorite sources of entertainment was the storyteller. And a good storyteller was likely to become one of the most popular citizens in the community. And Lincoln wanted to become popular, for he had a hankering for politics, and a well developed ability to tell good, funny stories often meant votes.

Lincoln's father Thomas and Uncle Mordecai were both renowned storytellers, and were both well liked in their respective communities. In his latter life Lincoln would often introduce a story by saying, "As my old father used to say," whether his father actually said it or not. In one of Lincoln's earliest campaign biographies, appears this statement, referring to candidate Lincoln: "From his father came that knack of storytelling

which made him so delightful among acquaintances and so irresistible in his stump and forensic drolleries." Lincoln, correcting the biography, let the statement stand.

Generally speaking Lincoln's humor was the typical humor of the time. As a master storyteller, Lincoln became familiar with the "tall tales", gargantuan exaggeration, and strait faced falsehoods which had as their origin the early settlers imaginative accounts of frontier life. And Lincoln began to genuinely appreciate the earthy humor and homespun philosophy of the farmers and frontiersmen. In his latter life he would assert that country people were the originators of most good stories; and it was to them and to the experiences of his own rural life that he went for many of his best yarns.

As an illustration of his appreciation ^{for} ~~of~~ country humor, Lincoln liked to tell the story of a certain Mr. John Moore. Mr. Moore came to Bloomington, Illinois one Saturday morning in a cart drawn by a fine pair of young, red steers. Throughout the morning and afternoon Mr. Moore sufficiently indulged himself with rum and "corn juice", as Lincoln called it. Consequently, he was late starting home. Besides his now very empty brown jug, Mr. Moore had a very heavy load upon his cart. In passing through a wooded grove that night, one wheel of his cart struck a hole or stump and threw the pole out of the ring of the yoke. The steers, finding themselves free, ran away, and left John Moore sound asleep in his cart, where he remained all night. Early in the morning he roused himself, and looking over the side of the cart and around in the woods, he said:

"If my name is John Moore, I've lost a pair of steers; if my name ain't John Moore, I've found a cart."

Lincoln also delighted in telling the story of James Larkin, who was a great hand to brag on anything he owned. On this particular occasion it was his horse. He stepped before Lincoln, who was in a crowd, and commenced talking to him, boasting all the while of his animal. "I have got the best horse in the country," he shouted to his listener. I ran him nine miles in exactly three minutes, and he never fetched a long breath." "Probably not", replied Lincoln father dryly, "but I presume he fetched a good many short ones."

The keenness of Lincoln's humor was acquired in large part from his intimate understanding of men. This understanding was developed considerably during his years at New Salem--where he lived on equal terms with the villagers--but was deeply enriched by his law practice and his experiences as an itinerant lawyer on the 6th Eighth Judicial Circuit. "On the circuit Lincoln not only studied human nature first hand," wrote biographer Benjamin P. Thomas, "but also developed his capacity as a storyteller. Free from the cares and worries of home, in the company of congenial and appreciable companions, he gave full vent to his whimsicality."

During the evenings, after the day's business in court had been accomplished, the lawyers would gather in their lodgishouse to participate in hours of serious discussion and unforgettable storytelling. Lincoln, with his endless supply of irresistibly funny stories, was the most popular storyteller. "Oh, Lord, wasn't he funny!", exclaimed fellow lawyer Usher F. Linder, "Any remark, any incident brought

from him an appropriate tale." Circuit Judge David Davis was so fond of Lincoln's stories that he would often sit up until after midnight listening to them, and then declare that he had laughed so hard that he believed his ribs had been shaken loose. Sometimes Judge Davis even stopped courtroom proceedings to listen to Lincoln's clever witticisms.

Lincoln delighted in telling of the little Frenchman who was out West during the winter of the "Deep Snow". The Frenchman's legs were so short, said Lincoln, that the seat of his trousers rubbed out his footprints as he walked. Another time, when asked how long a man's ~~legs~~ should be, Lincoln instantly replied that he reckoned they should at least be ~~long~~ enough to reach the ground.

Henry C. Whitney remembered an episode in Judge Davis' court when the judge came across a long bill in chancery, drawn up by an excellent, but rather lazy lawyer, named Snap. The judge, studying the bill, exclaimed: "Why, Brother Snap, how did you rake up enough energy to get up such a long bill?" "Dunno, Judge," replied Snap, squirming in his seat and uneasily scratching his head. The judge then held up the bill for all to see: "Astonishing, ain't it? Brother Snap did it. Wonderful, eh Lincoln?" This, of course, was a cue for Lincoln to interrupt with a joke; and he was, of course, ready. "It's like the lazy preacher," drawled Lincoln, "that used to write long sermons, and the explanation was that he got to writin', and was too lazy to stop."

Lincoln also liked to tell about the time his friend and law associate in Danville, Illinois, Ward Hill Lamon, tore the seat of his breeches during some horseplay in front of the courthouse. A petition was circulated among the lawyers, requesting contributions for the repair of the damaged trousers, whereupon Lincoln wrote, "I can contribute nothing to the end in view." Perhaps he would also relate the story about the farmer who bragged about the size of one year's hay crop. According to Lincoln, the farmer claimed it was so big, that when harvest time came he stacked all he could outdoors, and then put the rest of it in the barn. Or Lincoln on occasion might even tell about the old, strict judge who would hang a man for blowing his nose in the street, but would quash the indictment if it failed to specify which hand he blew it with.

Diller's drugstore on the square in Springfield was always a favorite gathering place for Lincoln and his cronies. Nearly every evening a crowd of fifteen to twenty met around the drugstore's stove and talked of everything under the heavens--and Lincoln was always ready with a story. His favorite position when telling a yarn was to sit with his long legs propped up on the rail of the stove, or with his feet against the wall, and thus he would sit for hours entertaining a crowd. And no one could "relate a story without reminding him of a similar one, and if a good storyteller was present, he was more than willing to share the time.

He was as much amused as any of his hearers at his own stories, and laughed more heartily than anyone. And when Lincoln told or heard a particularly good story, and the time came to laugh, "he would sometimes throw his left foot across his right knee, and clenching his foot with both hands and bending forward, his whole frame seemed to be convulsed with laughter."

For example, Lincoln liked to joke about the rather uninviting appearance of Springfield at that time, later a subject of much jest by the residents. According to Lincoln, a man one day applied to then Secretary of State Thomas Campbell for permission to deliver a series of lectures in the Hall of the House of Representatives at the Old State House. "May I ask what is to be the subject of your lectures?", inquired Campbell. "Certainly," came the answer, "They are on the second coming of the Lord." "It's no use," was Campbell's reply, as quoted by Lincoln. "If you will take my advice you will not waste your time in this city. It is my private opinion that if the Lord has been in Springfield once, he will not come a second time."

During his early Springfield years Lincoln sometimes lacked discretion when unleashing his ~~an~~ arsenal of humor. In fact, his gift for ridicule nearly led to fatality in 1842. On August 27 of that year, Lincoln wrote one of the four so called "Rebecca" letters, printed in the Sangamo Journal--the letters were signed with the alias name of "Rebecca". Lincoln's contribution, which mercilessly and tastelessly lampooned the state

auditor of accounts, James Shields, led to his being challenged to a duel by Shields. After a number of verbal and written exchanges, serious in intent, but in effect serio-comic and so complicated they would have done credit to Shakespeare's "Comedy of Errors", the duel was called off.

On another occasion Lincoln's remarkable talent for mimicry found him in the middle of a very difficult situation. In a speech at the courthouse, Jesse Thomas made several sarcastic allusions to Lincoln, and Lincoln, feeling the sting of Thomas' allusions, resorted to mimicry. And Lincoln's ability as a mimic, according to Herndon, was without rival. "He imitated Thomas in gesture and voice, at times caricaturing his walk and the very motions of his body," Herndon remembered. "Thomas, who was obliged to sit near by and endure the pain of the unique ordeal, was ordinarily sensitive; but the exhibition goaded him to desperation. He...actually gave way to tears...The next day it was the talk of the town, and for years afterwards it was called the "skinning of Thomas"...". Herndon afterward remembered Lincoln saying "that the recollection of his conduct that evening filled him with the deepest chagrin. He felt that he had gone too far, and to rid his good nature of a load, hunted up Thomas and made ample apology."~~A~~ Both of these episodes were lessons Lincoln never forgot, and from that time on he became more restrained in such situations.

Lincoln enjoyed telling a good joke on others, but he also had the rare ability to appreciate one on himself. In many cases he made himself the butt of his own joke. For example, he liked to tell of the time he was riding along a narrow road, and was met by a woman coming from the opposite direction. As she passed, the woman looked at Lincoln intently and finally observed: "Well, you are the ugliest man I ever saw." "Perhaps so," admitted Lincoln, "but I can't help that, madam." "No, I suppose not," agreed the woman, "but you might stay at home!"

Lincoln also told of the man who accosted him on the train, saying: "Excuse me, sir, but I have an article in my possession which rightfully belongs to you." "How is that?", asked Lincoln in amazement. Whereupon the stranger produced a jack knife and explained: "This knife was placed in my hands some years ago, with the injunction that I was to keep it until I found a man uglier than myself. Allow me to say, sir, that I think you are fairly entitled to the property."

Sometimes Lincoln liked to recall the time when a rather vicious looking fellow drew a revolver and thrust the weapon almost into his face. In such circumstances Lincoln realized that any attempt at argument was a waste of time and words. "What seems to be the matter?" inquired Lincoln, with all the courage he could muster. "Well," replied the stranger, who did not appear to be at all excited, "some years ago I swore an oath that if I ever came across an uglier man than

myself, I'd shoot him on the spot." A feeling of relief evidently took possession of Lincoln, for he calmly replied: "Shoot me, for if I am an uglier man than you I don't want to live."

Many times Lincoln would use humor to temper or respond to an attack by a political opponent. For example, during the Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Galesburg, Lincoln's opponent Stephen A. Douglas made the comment that Lincoln had failed in everything he had ever attempted--farming, law, and liquor selling. And now, said Douglas, he was trying politics, and would probably fail in that, too. Lincoln arose and agreed that Douglas had presented an accurate picture of his past. "It's true--every word of it. I've tried a lot of things, but there is one thing that Judge Douglas has forgotten. He told you that I sold liquor, but he didn't mention that while I had quit my side of the counter, the judge has remained on his."

Another time while he was in Congress in 1849 Lincoln made a long speech, intended to be humorous, in which he attacked General Lewis Cass, who was the Democratic candidate for the Presidency. In this passage he makes light of Cass's military exploits by comparing them to his own inglorious and rather uneventful experiences during the Black Hawk War. "By the way, Mr. Speaker, did you know I am a military hero? Yes, sir; in the days of the Black Hawk War I fought, bled

and come away. Speaking of General Cass's career reminds me of my own. I was not at Stillman's Defeat, but I was about as near it as Cass was to Hull's Surrender; and like him, I saw the place very soon afterward. It is quite certain I did not break my sword, for I had none to break; but I bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion. If Cass broke his sword, the idea is he broke it in desperation; I bent the musket by accident. If General Cass went in advance of me picking huckleberries, I guess I surpassed him in charges upon wild onions. If he saw any live, fighting Indians, it was more than I did; but I had a good many bloody struggles with the mosquitoes, and although I never fainted from the loss of blood, I can truly say I was often very hungry. Mr. Speaker, if they shall ever take me up as their candidate for the Presidency, I protest they shall not make fun of me, as they have of General Cass, by attempting to write me into a military hero."

Illustrative of Lincoln's flair for exaggeration and burlesque description is his comical description of an Illinois militia muster. "We remember the parades," he said, "at the head of which on horseback, rode our old friend Gordon Abrams, with a pine wood sword about nine feet long, and a pasteboard cocked hat, from front to rear about the length of an ox-yoke, and very much the same shape of one turned bottomwards; and with sours having revets as large as the bottom of a teacup, and shanks a

foot and a half long. That was the last militia muster here. Among the rules and regulations, no man was to wear more than five pounds of codfish for epaulets, or more than thirty yards of bologna sausage for a sash; and no two men were to dress alike, and if any two should dress alike, the one who dressed most alike was to be fined. Flags were carried at the muster which bore the motto: "We'll fight till we run, and we'll run till we die."

Many explanations of why Lincoln indulged in humor have been offered. Judge David Davis remembered how, on the circuit, "if the day was long and he was oppressed, the feeling was soon relieved by the narration of a story. The tavern loungers enjoyed it, and his melancholy, taking to itself wings, seemed to fly away." And many others noted how he would suddenly emerge from the deepest dejection with a quick pun or brilliant yarn.

But humor was more to Lincoln than a psychological reaction. It served many useful functions. It was, as Ward Hill Lamon said, "a labor saving contrivance."

For example, humor provided Lincoln with a means of getting on good terms with people. When he came to New Salem, on election day in 1831, he established himself in the good graces of the villagers by entertaining them with stories as they lounged about the polls. And many a visitor to the White House was put at ease by the President's colorful narration of an anecdote. For instance, Lincoln liked to tell about the time a group of his Springfield cronies came to

Washington to visit. Lincoln, of course, was delighted to see them. As one particular friend was about to leave one night, he said to Lincoln: "Now, Mr. President, I want you to be honest with me and tell me how you like being President of the United States." Lincoln replied: "You have heard the story, haven't you, about the man who was tarred and feathered and carried out of town on a rail? A man in the crowd asked him how he liked it. His ^{repu} was that if it weren't for the honor of the thing, he would much rather walk."

Many times Lincoln found in humor a necessary outlet to relieve his overburdened mind. In cabinet meetings he frequently recited passages from his favorite humorists to ease his mind before tackling a difficult problem or deciding upon an important step. Once, when he read a particularly good story before opening a cabinet meeting, he could not understand why the other members of the cabinet failed to appreciate the humor as he did. "Gentlemen," he is reported to have said, "why don't you laugh? With the fearful strain that is upon me night and day, if I did not laugh occasionally I should die, and you need this medicine as much as I do."

Sometimes Lincoln's sense of humor helped him ease his strained relations with certain members of his cabinet.

For example, when a delegation, which he had sent to Secretary of War Stanton with orders to grant their request, returned and reported that not only had Stanton refused to do so, but had actually called Lincoln a fool for sending such an order, Lincoln, with mock astonishment, inquired: "Did Stanton call

me a fool?"--and, upon being reassured upon that point, remarked: "Well, I guess I had better go over and see Stanton about this, for Stanton is usually right."

On another occasion Lincoln wrote Stanton a little note, requesting a certain appointment, saying: "Dear Stanton: Appoint this man chaplain in the army." Stanton wrote back: "Dear Mr. Lincoln: He is not a preacher." Lincoln replied with another note: "Dear Stanton: He is now."

Lincoln also liked to tell stories for sheer nonsense. Witness his unwillingness to apply the death penalty to soldiers who deserted because of cowardice for the reason that "it would frighten the poor devils to death to shoot them." Or his story about the old Irishman with the new boots who was afraid he would not be able to get them on until he had worn them a day or two to stretch them.

During the war, when his storytelling was widely known, Lincoln told this story, and probably led the laughter when ~~telling~~ ^{telling} it. It seems that two Quakers were in a railroad coach talking. One of them, speaking of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, said, "I think Davis will succeed." "Why does thee think so?" asked the other. Because Jefferson Davis is a praying man," replied the first. "But so is Abraham a praying man," said the second. "Yes", came the reply, "but the Lord will think that Abraham is joking."

Lincoln often turned to humor as a means of escaping from a difficult position or avoiding an embarrassing commitment. Billy Herndon remembered that Lincoln was at his best when outwitting people who came to him to get information

that he did not wish to divulge. In such cases Lincoln did most of the talking, "swinging around what he suspected was the vital point, but never hearing it, interlarding his answers with a seemingly endless supply of stories and jokes." The importunate visitor would leave in splendid spirits; but after walking a few blocks would realize that he had not achieved his purpose. "Blowing away the froth of Lincoln's humorous narratives," said Herndon, "he would find nothing left." ~~There~~

Once a certain governor came to Lincoln and angrily requested demands Lincoln couldn't possibly grant. "I suppose you found it necessary to make large concessions to him, as he returned from your interview completely satisfied," suggested a friend. "Oh, no," replied the President, "I did not concede anything. You have heard how that Illinois farmer got rid of a big log that was too big to haul away, too knotty to split, and too wet and soggy to burn? Well, when asked how he got rid of it the farmer replied, "Well, now, boys, if you won't divulge the secret, I'll tell you how I got rid of it--I plowed around it," "Now, remarked Lincoln, "don't tell anybody, but that's the way I got rid of the governor. I plowed all around him, but it took me three mortal hours to do it, and I was afraid every minute he'd see what I was up to."

On the judicial circuit an appropriate yarn frequently put across his point to the jury in a clearer manner than hours of argument could have done. And during his Presidency he

found his stories no less useful. They were an invaluable aid when expressing clarity of meaning. As law partner Herndon explained: "Mr. Lincoln was often perplexed to give expression to his ideas...He was frequently at a loss for a word, and hence compelled to resort to stories, maxims, and jokes to embody his ideas." "I have found in the course of a long experience," Lincoln once explained to Chauncey M. Depew, "that common people—common people—take them as they run, are more easily influenced and informed through the medium of a story than in any other way."

For example, when Horace Greeley, legendary editor of the New York Tribune, made Lincoln the subject of constant and scathing editorial criticism, Lincoln was reminded of a story. "It reminds me of the big fellow," he said, "whose little wife beat him over the head without resistance. The man said to some concerned friends, "Let her alone. It don't hurt me, and ~~das~~ it does her a power of good."

In another instance Lincoln illustrated the virtue of patience in a story he told when his tardiness made him and other officials miss a train to New York. The President was reminded of a convict who was about to be hanged for murdering his cellmate. There was much shoving and confusion in the crowds on the road to witness the execution. As a group of perspiring men rushed past the cart in which the convicted man was riding, he called out, "Don't be in a hurry, boys. You've got plenty of time. There won't be any fun till I get there." Thus the President drew his moral. "That's the condition of things now," he said, "There won't be any fun in New York until I get there."

Lincoln also liked to tell of the time when he decided to replace his then Secretary of War, and several senators thought the occasion was ideal to replace all seven cabinet members and thus restore the waning confidence of the country. Lincoln listened patiently and then replied: "Gentlemen, your request for a change of the whole cabinet, because I have made one change, reminds me of a story I once heard in Illinois, of a farmer who was much troubled by skunks. His wife insisted that the farmer get rid of them. So he loaded his shotgun one moonlit night and awaited developments. After some time the wife heard the shotgun go off, and in a few minutes the farmer entered the house. "Did you have any luck?" asked the wife. "Well," said the old man, "I hid myself behind the wood-pile, with the shotgun pointed toward the hen roost, and before long there appeared not one skunk, but seven. I took aim, blazed away, killed one, and he raised such a fearful smell that I concluded it was best to let the other six go." Once again Lincoln drew his moral, and the senators, getting the message, laughed and retired.

During his precious few moments of relaxation in the White House Lincoln liked to read the works of contemporary wits. He was especially fond of David Ross Locke, better known as Petroleum V. Nasby, whose political satires were quite popular. Nearly every man who has written recollections of Lincoln has told how the President, in the middle of a serious conversation, would suddenly stop and ask his hearer if he ever read the Nasby letters. So high was Lincoln's regard for Petroleum that he is reported to have said, "I am going to write Petroleum to come

down here, and I intend to tell him that if he will communicate his talents to me, I will gladly swap places with him!"

Lincoln loved to pass along the good things he heard or read. His own pleasure was enhanced by the pleasure he gave others. John Hay, one of Lincoln's secretaries in the White House, remembered such an incident. "A little after midnight... the President came into the office laughing, with a volume... in his hand to show me a little caricature... seemingly utterly unconscious that he, with his short skirt hanging about his long legs, and setting out behind like the tail feathers of an enormous ostrich, was infinitely funnier than anything in the book he was laughing at... What a man it is! Occupied all day with matters of vast moment, deeply anxious about the fate of the greatest army in the world, with his own fame and future hanging upon the events of the passing hour, he yet has such a wealth of simple bonhomie and good fellowship, that he gets out of bed and perambulates the house in his shirt, to find us that we may share the fun..."

"Lincoln's humor," wrote biographer Benjamin P. Thomas, "in its unconventionality, its use of back country vernacular, its willingness to see things as they were, its shrewd comments in homely, earthy phrase,... typified the American humor of his time... In his humor, as in his rise from obscurity to fame and in his simple, democratic faith and thought, he epitomized the American ideal."

Old Abe's Humor Often Made Point

By CLARK KINNAIRD, Hearst Headline Service Special to the Sentinel

SOME STAID members of his cabinet felt it undignified for President Lincoln to inject homely humor so frequently into his speeches, public statements and conferences at the White House.

Lincoln commented to a friend:

"They say I tell a great many stories; I reckon I do, but I have learned from long experience that plain people, take them as they run, are more easily influenced through the medium of a broad and humorous illustration than any other way; and what the hypercritical few may think, I don't care."

He also explained, "A funny story, if it has the element of genuine wit, has the same effect on me that I suppose a good square drink of whisky has on an old toper; it puts new life into me. The fact is that I have always believed that a good laugh was good for both the mental and the physical digestion."

HERE ARE some choice Lincoln stories, as found in his letters or speeches, or recorded by biographers:

Lincoln referred jocularly to his homeliness: "When I was two months old I was the handsomest child in Kentucky, but my Negro nurse swapped me off for another boy just to please a friend who was going down the river whose child was rather plain-looking."

LINCOLN repeated, with delight, the story of the country hick who stepped up to an aristocratic-looking lady and told her: "Jeepers creepers, but you sure are a handsome looking woman." She snapped haughtily to the stranger, "Young man, I wish I could say the same thing of you." He responded with a grin, "You could, lady, if you were as big a liar as I am."

BESET BY office-seekers, Lincoln said, "I am like a man so busy in letting rooms at one end of his house that he can't stop to put out the fire that is burning up the other."

ONCE THE CONFLICTING demands made on him reminded Lincoln of his two

boys, Tad and Willie, when small. "One had a toy the other wanted and clamored for. At last I told him to let his brother have it in order to quiet him. The boy blurted out, 'but, I must have it to quiet myself.'"

AN OLD ILLINOIS acquaintance of Lincoln's called upon him with a view to securing a profitable war contract. Lincoln told him that contracts were not what they used to be. "In fact," Lincoln said, "they remind me of a piece of meadowland in the Sangamon bottoms during a drouth."

"How was that?" the contract seeker asked.

"Why," said Lincoln, "the grass was so short they had to lather it before they could mow it."

LINCOLN TOLD of a youth who emigrated from New York to the West and soon wrote back to his father, who was something of a politician, "Dear Dad: I have settled here and like it first rate. Do come out here, Dad, for almighty mean men get office here."

"THERE ARE TWO things even God Almighty doesn't know: How an Illinois jury

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